

Hawkins: The Upside by **allonsysilvertongue**

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Summary: My collection of one-shots for Jopper. Also includes Jopper being parent.

1. Maybe

Hi all, this is my first Jopper fic so I'm excited about sharing it with you :) It takes place mostly after Chapter 9: The Gate.

I'm hoping to expand this into a collection of one-shots so please feel free to send me prompts on here or on my tumblr (allonsysilvertongue)

Maybe

The roads in Hawkins were long and winding, especially when one's home is a cabin somewhere in the woods. As he drove, Jim Hopper lighted up his second cigarette. He had just dropped El off - *Jane*, he corrected himself and it was something he still needed to get used to – at the Snow Ball.

Of course, he had told her – *promised* – that he would head home just to give her some space. She had smiled at him, not truly understanding what 'space' meant yet. He had talked himself the night before that it would be okay to give her room to breathe and to enjoy herself like the kid that she is.

Except.... He was worrying himself to a state right now even as he drove home.

It was *one* night.

It was important to her but it didn't mean he would worry less. They had spent a year being careful, not being stupid, and to suddenly just let her go like this for the night where she would be in *public* and where anyone could see her was making him sick.

He needed to stop worrying. He needed to find something else to focus on.

His thoughts drifted to Joyce.

If he was in this state, he guessed, she would be worst off. She wouldn't be heading home and perhaps, neither should he. If

anything were to happen, he would be in the vicinity.

Flicking his cigarette off, Jim turned the car around and drove back for the middle school. He was back there in less than five minutes which meant, he couldn't last out there without worrying about El being out of the house for more than that time.

He stepped out of his vehicle and into the night, and there she was, a familiar figure leaning against a car as she watched the school.

Two peas in a pod.

"Thought I might find you out here."

There was no need to tell her that like her, he couldn't seem to stay away from the kid. She could probably guess so he simply offered her a cigarette. Sharing a cigarette between them was something old and familiar, and lately, with all that they had been forced to go through together, it has become comforting, for him, at least.

Smoking was also a good distraction to have especially if they were going to talk about heavy things.

"Every day it does get a little easier," he told her, putting an arm around her to comfort.

At first, he didn't think that she would lean in for comfort, assuming that she would very much prefer Bob's comfort than his but maybe, he was all she has right now, the only other adult to fully understand her situation. So when she reached up to touch the tip of his fingers on her shoulder, he dropped kiss to her head.

"We've got to stop meeting like this," he chuckled.

She laughed lightly and he really liked the sound of it.

"Well, I'm not calling you in a panic because some monster is after my baby. You're here because we are *both* worried parents."

That sent a jolt through him. Parent... He never thought he would hear himself be described as such again, not since his girl...

He shook his head, refusing to dwell on such thoughts.

"I guess that's another way to keep meeting," he said, his chest rumbled with every word.

Maybe they didn't have to do it in the parking lot...

He supposed in the future, El would be hanging out with the boys often, and it wouldn't do for them to lurk around being worried so the words came out before he could stop himself, "You - you want to go for – um- coffee sometime?"

In that split second he wished he could take it back. He just meant that they could accompany each other, two worried people, without it sounding like he was asking her out. Truthfully, he wouldn't be opposed to it but it would be too soon. It was the last thing Joyce needed.

"You know... to just wait the kids out or something when they have – um – school stuffs," he cleared his throat. "You know, maybe...?"

He wished he was more eloquent but words were never his strongest suit. Physical strength and brute force was something he was good at.

"Maybe."

He looked up to see her smiling at him, and the thought of that *maybe*, that *someday* was enough for him.

2. The Gift

This one-shot is about Jim giving Eleven a precious gift and Joyce soft of become Jim's go to for Eleven's fashion. In short, it's Jopper being parent.

The Gift

His truck was idling by the parking lot, facing the middle school directly. Next to him, El leaned forward in her seat, watching as the other kids walked in. He spotted Dustin not far from where they were, talking to Steve through the unwind car window.

"I'll go now."

Jim blinked at the sound of the seat belt being released from its clasped.

"Wait," he put a hand on her arm. "Hold on."

She shot him a quizzical look and he could see the hint of fear in her eyes. The fear that he might change his mind about letting her out tonight and was going to drive them both home.

"Usually..." He cleared her throat, a little out of his comfort zone right now. "During prom – not that this is one or something – but *usually*, the boy gives you a corsage."

Her brows crinkled. "Corsage?"

Jim rubbed the back of his neck before he shifted, angling his body towards his young charge.

"It's – um – a bouquet of flowers, you know, to wear on your dress," he explained as El glanced down at her own blue dress, "or on your wrist."

"Like bandanna," she nodded in understanding, referencing the time, a month before, when she came back with that punk over do. "Mike will give me a corsage and I... put it on?"

"Nah," Jim shook his head. "Mike probably wouldn't. It's just a school

dance but – uh- I have something for you for the dance. Not flowers or anything but – it means a lot to me."

His fingers brushed lightly against the blue hair ribbon around his wrist, something he had worn to remind him of Sara even through all the drinking and prescription drugs. That was *before...* Before he found himself surrounded by Joyce and middle school kids and three teenagers banding together to fight a monster, before El came into his life... before he signed the papers,

He had never parted from the bracelet he kept around his wrist but that was his past. Now... Perhaps, it was time to embrace this second change and this new person that he damn well would fight to be a permanent fixture in his life. It used to belong to his little girl Sara but she wasn't here and he would never know what she would want for him, but he figured, she wouldn't want him to keep living in the past. El is as good as his now.

Pulling the bracelet free from his wrist, Jim gently took El's hand and slipped the bracelet around her wrist. He adjusted it so it would fit her.

"But this is yours," she looked up at him.

"It's yours now," he smiled down at her. Jim reached out to ruffle her hair but she moved her head out of the way before he could mess it up. They had both spent nearly half an hour on it after all. He patted her shoulder. "Don't lose it, kid."

She smiled, fiddling with the bracelet.

"I won't."

"Hey," he chuckled, "matches the colour of your dress."

The dress that he had to call Joyce a few days earlier for help. She had come with him while El waited at home. She had brought Will along strangely enough, and they bought the dress for the Snow Ball together with a few other pieces of clothing for his kid to wear every other day. His cutout shirts were too big and baggy. He personally wanted El to look presentable now that he wouldn't have to keep

hiding her, that the boys and Max would likely drop by the cabin after school to hang out.

Joyce had picked out several comfortable shirts, blouses, skirts and pants, two dresses, together with hair bands and hair clips along with eyeliners and lip gloss.

"What about panties?" Joyce mouthed, looking over Will's head at him.

He tips of his ears turned crimson as he shrugged

"Probably need those too," he muttered.

He had shuffled awkwardly after them, feeling out of place in the ladies' department as did Will. Joyce had at one point, snapped at him to wait in the car because his constant hovering was scaring the teenage girl in the store who was only trying to help them.

"Ice cream, buddy?

Will had jumped at that and they made a dash for the exit.

"Can I go now?" El asked, breaking through his reverie.

"Yeah, don't get into any trouble. I'll be right out here if anything happens. See you at nine."

She nodded.

"Look that's Will and his mom. You should wait with her," she smiled and hopped off the truck.

With a wave, she was gone but he never took his eyes off her until she disappeared behind the doors into the school.

Reviews are like eggos. It makes me happy.

3. Period

Eleven is unwell. Hopper feels helpless. He calls on Joyce to help. It's difficult when you have a psychic child who is sick. Jopper being parent, again.

Period

With the Gate now closed and with Will slowly becoming himself again, not that Joyce would truly ever be certain that he was safe, she liked to enjoy an occasional moment when she could sleep in on a weekend.

It was past nine in the morning and she figured she would give it another hour before she would get up. That was until the door to her bedroom burst open and Will rushed in.

Joyce sat up immediately, her senses suddenly all on full alert.

"What's the matter, baby?"

Her eyes roamed his body from head to toe to ascertain if he was injured before her gaze eventually met his. She held her breath, so very afraid of seeing the blank, empty gaze that had stared back at her when his body had been a host to the Mind Flayer.

His pupils were blown wide but they were bright with something between excitement and anxiety.

"It's the Chief! He's on the phone. He said something's not right with Eleven," Will breathed, the words came out in a jumbled rush.

At Hopper's name, Joyce swung her legs out of bed and rushed towards the phone that Jonathan had restored following the events six months ago when it was ripped off the wall.

"Hello? It's me. Will told me – "

"Come out here *now*," he commanded.

She frowned. He sounded on edge.

"What's going on? Will said something about Jane... Is she okay?"

"El... She's - She's in some kind of pain. I don't know what exactly but she's not moving off the bed. Look, you need to get here quick."

Any other normal parent would have quickly suggested the clinic or hospital but this was Jane. There were protections needed to be taken into account. Most of all, she knew Hopper only allowed her to leave the house that one night during the Snow Ball. It was still not quite safe for her to be in public.

"I'll be there," she assured him.

Joyce brought Will along with her because she did not want him alone at the house, not with Jonathan over at Nancy's. Plus, she figured, Jane would be happy to see someone her own age.

Once they reached the cabin, Joyce would immediately tell that something was not right. The air felt... *tense*. She opened the door cautiously and gasped. Will stared.

The furniture in the room was airborne, just hanging and spinning slowly in the air as if it was hanging by an invisible thread.

Hopper really had his hands full with a psychic teenager, she thought. She didn't want to think about when Jane threw a tantrum.

"I need you to talk to me, kid. I can't help if you don't."

She followed the sound of Hopper's voice which led her straight to Jane's bedroom. The girl in question was curled on the bed, which she noticed was the *only* furniture still grounded.

"El, come on," Hopper cajoled, sitting at the edge of the bed and looking helpless. She didn't like that look on his face. He *always* knew what to do, except when he had to shop for clothes for El, and she could always rely on him lately. "I could – Joyce! Look, kid, Joyce's here. She's brought Will along. Hey, buddy."

She could hear the relief in his voice as she approached.

"Hey, Chief," Will waved and gestured around him. "This is..."

something."

"Yeah, it's been like this since about an hour ago when she started complaining about the pain. I can't figure out..." He shrugged. "Thought you could... Help her or get her to talk."

"Jane, honey," Joyce stepped forward and took the place by the bed that Hopper had just vacated. It was warm and he must have been there all these while, worried about his girl. She brushed Jane's hair comfortingly. "What's wrong? Can you tell me where it hurts?"

She had a shrewd idea since the girl was clutching her stomach. With her face pressed on the pillow, Joyce doubted Jane even knew what was happening around her or how her powers seem to be affecting the objects in the house.

"Is it here? Is this where the pain is?" Joyce asked, pressing gently on her upper abdomen once she managed to get Jane to lie on her back.

The girl shook her head. So Joyce pressed lightly, this time lower.

Again, Jane shook her head. Joyce moved lower, near her cervix to the right hip which made her whimper.

Jackpot.

"That should rule out of food poisoning," Joyce declared. With two children of her own, she was familiar with ailment relating to the abdomen but since this was lower... She bit her lip. "Do you feel... different lately? Tired or irritable? Maybe, backache?"

"She's been tired," Hopper answered from where he was leaning against the doorframe watching them.

Joyce nodded, acknowledging that information. "I'm going to help you off the bed and we'll go to the toilet. Alright?"

At that request, Jane nodded and even though she didn't understand *why*, she pushed herself out of bed regardless. Hopper, on the other hand, tossed her a perplexed look to which Joyce simply pursed her lips and shook her head. She needed confirmation to her suspicion and once she has that, she would explain it to him.

"Pretty cool what you're doing here," Will smiled at Jane as she passed him, pointing to the swiveling lamp above his head.

Her gaze flickered to her surrounding as if only just realizing and then she looked at Hopper, "Sorry," she mumbled and immediately, all the objects fell back with a loud thud, everywhere in the house.

Once they were in the toilet, Joyce patiently waited as Jane removed her pants and stripped down. When she stepped out of her panties, they both looked down. Jane's breath hitched, the fear frozen on her face.

Joyce smiled.

"I think we have our answer of what's happening with you," she spoke in a soft voice. "It's okay, darling. It's something every girl will experience at some point in their life."

"Bleeding?"

"Yes... You're menstruating, having your period," Joyce said as cleaned the mess. With two boys, she never expected to find herself in the position where she had to explain about menstruation to a girl. "The pain you felt, they are called cramps. Nothing a hot bottle, some painkillers and chocolate wouldn't solve. You will have this every month. It's your first time which is why it's so... foreign to you but it is nothing to worry about, Jane. Although... if it gets very unbearable you *have* to tell me, okay?

"Okay," she agreed. "Max... She gets it too?"

"If she hasn't she will."

"You?"

"Me too," Joyce smiled. "Now, I'll get some clean pants for you and we can talk about it more. I'll tell you what I know and you can ask me all the questions you have."

Once she had Jane settled back in bed with a hot bottle across her stomach, she went out to meet Hopper. Will disappeared into the bedroom, carrying a plate of Eggos that he had prepared with Hopper

while waiting.

"What happened?"

The Chief had his hands on his hips, staring at Joyce as he waited for an explanation.

"Oh, nothing serious," Joyce laughed lightly, realizing with a little fondness in her heart that his excessive worrying was actually adorable. She reached out to squeeze Hopper's arm. "Just, you know, she's just had her period for the first time."

He blinked and it was clear *that* was not what he was expecting at all.

"Already?" he frowned. "She's a kid."

"She's going to be 14 in a few months. It's the age. You should get some tampons and pads from the store. We don't know which she prefers right now so it'll be best if you get both. I can wait here and show her how it's done."

"What – What is she using... now."

"We ladies... We always have emergencies. So I gave her mine *but* you really do need to get it."

"Okay," he nodded. "Anything else?"

"Probably hot pack, chocolate and ice cream...."

"Thanks, Joyce," Hopper muttered, drawing a stick out from his pack.

He lighted it up and offered it to her.

"Nothing to worry about," Joyce lightly bumped his shoulder with hers. "I guess you owe me."

She was teasing. At this point, they didn't owe each other anything.

"Sure," Hopper said easily.

"Will's at that age, you know. He'll be needing the talk soon and it'll be better coming from ... a male. He'll have questions and you should

be able to answer it better than me," she said casually, the playful smile dancing on her lips. "I'll call on you to do what's needed."

He paled.

4. Figure From The Past

requested by anon: just wanted to say adore your writing, prompt: brenner/hopper ultimate confrontation, brenner tries to manipulate eleven into going back to him, calling her his daughter etc. She's scared out of her mind, paralyzed from fear, hopper knocks brenner out, assures El he really loves her not brenner

Figure from The Past

Post Mind-Flayer, his life was... good. It was not easy, but it was good.

Hawkins Lab had closed down, at least in Indiana, which was one thing off his mind. Although he was sure the Department of Energy have plenty of other labs in other parts of the country but... that was not *his* problem. He tried not to care too much other than what was in front of him.

And that was El.

Hopper had taken time to sit El down just to explain to her of the adoption papers he had signed and what it meant for them. She had repeated the name 'Jane Hopper' almost in reverence and it had stirred something in his heart he thought had died with Sarah.

He could do this. For once, he had hope. El could never replace Sarah but... she was a balm. It wasn't what he thought when he first took her in but she was a soothing balm to his wound, and something for him to focus his energy on.

"You and I... We're gonna be in this together for the long haul," he patted her hand, smiling at her. "You know what that means? It means forever."

"Forever," El repeated with a nod, letting her finger scratch against his beard with a grin. "This is ... *home*."

Home... The word sounded safe in her mouth and he held on to it.

They were not so different after all. None of them had really felt at home anywhere. This was something they could build on now.

As the weeks melted together, and having talked about it with Dr. Owens, they had both agreed to ease El slowly back into society. But instead of enrolling her in a school for the upcoming semester, El was home schooled first. The books came from the boys from their previous grades as Hopper tried to help her catch up on years of missed academia. The gang visited her after their school to do homework, answer her questions and play board games.

Naturally, his cabin became *the* meeting point. At some point, Karen Wheeler and Joyce Byers had invaded his house. He at least saw it as an invasion, when they took it upon themselves to stock up his kitchen. Joyce had rearranged his beer cans so they were out of sight from the kids and Karen had made sure there were enough snacks to last for two weeks.

He found himself dropping by during his rounds around town to check on the kids, and sometimes wondered how his house became an after school 'day care'.

About four months after the papers were signed, Hopper began taking the kid out in public once or twice a day in the week. Sometimes they would go for breakfast or dinner at the diner or sometimes he would bring her along to the store where Joyce work.

El didn't talk much, only when she was addressed directly and even then, she would sometimes look his way just to make sure it was okay. Whenever he was out with her, he noticed the whispers and smiles he got behind his back. He supposed it must be a sight – him and the kid.

"One of your women you fuck around finally left a kid at your door, huh, Chief?"

"Your math must be really awful," he retorted at the guy. "Kid's much older."

He didn't owe anyone any explanation of who El is and how she came to be. Those who knew, people like Joyce, could be trusted to keep

that to themselves.

"So," he started just as they were served pancakes at the diner, "heard you won at dominoes yesterday."

El barely batted an eyelash, as she focused on pouring an unhealthy amount of maple syrup all over her breakfast. "Yes."

"Boys let you win?"

She stopped squeezing the bottle.

"Did not," she sat glaring at him.

The chuckles coming from him made her shake her head but her expression softened considerably.

"Did your English homework?"

"Yes. Don't like homework."

This time, Hopper tried to hide the smirk just so she wouldn't take it to mean that it was okay or encourage her to skip her learning. But he was glad to hear that. She sounded almost like a normal teenager whose biggest problem was homework and not alternate dimensions.

"Presumptuous."

He paused with the fork halfway to his mouth, "What?"

"Dustin said," she lifted her eyes. "New word. What does it mean?"

"It means... When someone's behaving boldly... more confident than they should," he settled for that.

"Oh," she nodded seriously, filing that information for later use. "Can I go to the arcade later?"

May, he corrected silently, but let it slide. Instead of giving an immediate answer, Hopper stuffed a piece of bacon in his mouth and chewed. He knew the boys and Max liked to hit the arcade in the afternoon. He could drop her off before his afternoon shift today and

pick her up an hour or so later.

"Sure. Yeah," he shrugged.

She could probably use the fun. It wouldn't do to have her all brooding, gloomy and serious later in life. She was a kid and she needed to be a kid. He wanted that for her, as best as he could provide it, given the situation.

The look on the gang's faces alone was worth the drive to the arcade. They lighted up when they saw his truck coming in. Mike stepped forward, opening El's door with a wide grin.

"Let's see if you can beat my high score," Max smirked.

"Be back in an hour, kid. Wait out here," Hopper shouted through the rolled down window.

Swinging by the Byers' house, he saw Joyce's car was out front. He parked his truck and knocked on her door.

Hopper heard hurried footsteps and a shout of his name before the door was pulled open to reveal a slightly breathless woman.

"What's the matter? Is it Will?"

"Maybe I should come by often so you wouldn't panic each time you see it's me on your door," he joked. "Relax. Last I checked, Will was at the arcade where you dropped him off."

The way the tension in her shoulders visibly eased let him know that as long as Will was out of her sight, she would *always* worry. Alternate dimensions and monsters was not something any parent could bounce from easily.

"Don't mean to be rude, Hop, but why are you here? You here to sample my meatball spaghetti? Jonathan thinks it's the best out there."

"That an invitation to dinner or what?"

She snorted but left the door open as she stepped back so he took his

cue and followed. In her kitchen, he leaned against the counter, watching her pour sauce into the pan.

"Flame's too big," he commented.

She shot him an incredulous look but turned it down before the sauce burnt. He tapped the pack in his breast pocket, a silent question to which she shook her head to decline the invitation.

"Where's Jane?"

"At the arcade."

Her brows shot up in surprise.

"You let her?"

He gave a one shoulder shrug, trying hard not to think too much about her being off on her own without him around.

"Baby steps, figured the arcade wouldn't be so bad," he answered.
"Sure, you don't want a smoke?"

"They will be okay," she smiled at him and he wasn't sure if she was trying to assure him or convince herself. "How is your... daughter? Tell me – I haven't seen her at all this week."

Her eyes twinkled and he was reminded of the Joyce Byers he knew in school, the one who was a tease, a little carefree and one he had got to know better over a few sessions of detention. He never knew that petite girl sitting three seats in front of him in English was a spitfire until he was at the receiving end of it during detention.

"Fine. She's fine. We're good. Turns out she doesn't like homework," he gave a mock gasp.

She laughed, and he really liked the way it seemed to make her look younger, less worried.

"So, uh, I've got to work overnight tonight so, you mind looking after El? You know since you haven't seen her this week, now's your chance."

"Aha," she waved the ladle in his face. "So that is the real reason you're here."

His bark of laughter seemed to delight her the way it did for him. He wondered if this was considered flirting because it was so different than the ones he was used to when he was younger which of course, made him wonder if Joyce flirts. He had been dropping hints but she seemed to brush off his efforts so far. Probably still too soon after Bob's death. Give it time, he told himself.

She dropped her head, focused on the sauce once more but she was smiling.

"You don't have to try so hard to convince me, Hop. I'll do it," she said. "It'll be good to have some female company here once in a while."

This wasn't the first time she had taken El in when he had to work night. Sure he had left the kid alone numerous times pre - Mind Flayer but he didn't have to keep her hidden and here with the Byers.... She could socialise. The fact that Joyce adored her was a nice bonus.

"Thanks, Joyce. I'll send her over a little before dinner so *she* can sample your meatball spaghetti."

She hummed.

"Tell you what," Hopper flicked off the ashes of his cigarette in the ashtray by the windowsill. "To show you how I very much appreciate you helping me out, I'll pick Will up from the arcade when I get El so you won't have to drive all way out there."

She rolled her eyes. "I'd say you're chivalrous, Jim Hopper, but as it happen, you have to drive to the arcade to get Jane here anyway."

"You got me," he chuckled, leaving her shaking her head as he headed back out to the truck.

The last thing he expected when he arrived at the arcade was to see a teenager with a bad mullet haircut fuming near the entrance. *Max's brother*, he recalled, *the guy who beat up that other kid, Steve.*

Max, Dustin and Lucas were nowhere to be seen and a quick count of the bicycles parked outside confirmed that two was missing. Mike, he noticed, was on the pay phone, clearly frantic and trying to call -

"Chief Hopper!" Mike startled when he saw him, dropping the receiver to hang by its cord. "I called but - He's got her! He got El."

"Who's got her?"

"The lab guy. The - "

"Dr. Owens?"

He knew deep down that it wasn't him because Mike wouldn't have panicked. But if it was Dr. Owens, Hopper would know where to find him *and* give the doctor a piece of his mind for pulling shit like this. He would know where to find Dr. Owens.

"The guy who ... I - I can't remember his name. From the lab. El calls him Papa. He - He just came and took her away in his car and El didn't want to go but he pulled her hand, and we couldn't -"

He felt the icy cold dread, could hear his blood rushing in his vein. It was presumed that Martine Brenner was dead but El had actually told him what came from her little road trip to find her mother - that Brenner might still be alive out there - if the former agent was to be believed.

Brenner was here. He had taken El.

Hopper's fingers curled into a fist, his breathing heavy. He forced himself to remain calm, to *think*.

He couldn't lose her. He couldn't lose another kid, not again. This was his worst nightmare coming to life.

"How long ago was this?" He demanded.

Will burst out the front door and came to a staggering stop when he spotted Hopper. He breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that with the Chief around things would be handled

"Just left," he said, slightly breathless. "I lost sight of them from the window. Max, Dustin and Lucas chased his car on their bikes. I don't know how far they can go on but - "

That was all Hopper needed to know before he took off running to his truck.

"The hell are you doing?" He hollered at the teenager leaning against his car, watching them with open disinterest. "Didn't think to go after your sister?"

"She knows she's walking if she's late," he retorted.

Menace, Hopper thought violently.

He would have asked Billy to send Will back to Joyce since he still wasn't allowed to go anywhere on his bike but Hopper wasn't in the trusting mood right now, so he told Mike to get Karen to get them *both* home.

He didn't wait to see if Mike called his mother. Hopper jumped into his truck and gave chase, tyres peeling against the asphalt. Five minutes out, he drove passed the three kids, panting by the road side.

"Get back to home all of you and *stay* home," he shouted out the window. "I got it."

The blue sedan was within sight and he stepped on the gas, muttering under his breath for the truck to go faster. If he could just cut the car off...

It was then that he caught sight of the wobbling tree in front of him and jammed brake. The tree fell in front of the car, crushing its hood and pinning it in place. Eleven must have seen his truck coming for her.

"Good kid," he smacked the dashboard in pride.

Jumping out the truck, he pulled the door of the blue car open, gun pointing in front of him. Inside, El was screaming, tugging hard at something they had only halfway managed to fix on her head. He didn't know what it was but if he was out here trying to kidnap a kid

with psychic abilities, he would try to shut that power down temporarily and he supposed that thing around her head was it.

Brenner emerged from the car with blood trickling from a head wound. At the sight of him, Hoppers stomach churned and as the scientist saw Hopper standing there, his lips curled into a malicious smirk.

"We meet again."

He was dressed as he did before, in pressed suit, matching tie and polished shoes but his face was that of a tired old man, not that Hopper had any sympathies for him in his heart.

"Can't say I'm pleased."

"You have my daughter," Benner stated calmly which only enraged Hopper. "Come here, Eleven."

It must have been years of having that command ingrained in her because El jerked forward, involuntarily. Instinctively, Hopper put a hand on her shoulder to stay her but she seemed completely unaware of it. Her eyes were fixed on that man.

"You disappointed me, Eleven," Benner spoke softly, almost soothingly and Hopper didn't trust that sickly silky voice. "You left when we could have done so much more."

Her lips quivered and Hopper blinked. This was the same girl who had easily killed demadogs and monster without any fear and yet now, she stood rooted to the spot, clearly paralysed by terror.

He wished he could take away the years of trauma. He wished he could fix her, make El whole and unafraid.

"It's okay, darling," Brenner knelt in front of her. The affectionate tone the man was trying so hard to adopt sounded misplaced. "I forgive you. I'm your Papa and I want to tell you now that everything is okay. We'll forget the past and we can work it all out from here. All you need to do is get the tree off the car and come with me."

"Don't listen to him, kid." Hopper said, his voice gruff from the fear

he was trying to mask. He had faced unspeakable things from another dimension and yet the thought of El being taken away from him was more horrifying than anything. "He wants something from you. He ain't here 'cause he's suddenly had a change of heart and cares about you."

Brenner stood where he was, unwavering. He held his hand out to Eleven.

"Don't you dare. I'll shoot you dead," Hopper warned.

"Really? In front of *her*?" he taunted. "Now, what will she think?"

"Come on, El, let's go," Hopper tugged lightly on her shoulder, hoping that it would snap her back.

He would get Powell or someone in the station to get Brenner but the important thing right now, was to get El away from this toxic junk as quickly as he could.

"Eleven," Benner spoke her name firmly and with authority that he used to control her with. "Your place is with me. Next to me, always. We'll go to your Mama. A ... family," he forced the word out, as if it cost him a lot just to say it. "I know you want that."

A muscle in Hopper's jaw ticked. He feared if El would fall for that, hook line and sinker. Family was him. It was them in his cabin. Family was not with this abusive scientist whose only goal in seeking her out right now when it would jeopardise his freedom was likely driven by desperation to save his skin, to claw at some bullshit scientific breakthrough. It was for selfish reasons and nothing else.

He would not allow El or anyone to go through that.

He gripped the gun tighter in his hand, his index finger ready to squeeze the trigger.

"I know what you want, Eleven. I've always known."

"That's enough," Hopper snapped, and without any warning, landed a solid punch straight for the man's nose.

He heard the sickening crunch. Hopper had never felt so satisfied. Brenner fell backward from the force of it and as if the spell was broken, El blinked.

She looked around. Her gaze caught his and he knelt in front of her so they were eye to eye.

"You okay?"

"Yes. I was..." She touched her chest and Hopper covered her hand with his, feeling the erratic beating of her heart. "... scared."

"It's over. He's down," Hopper said. "I got you, kid. I'm always gonna have your back so you don't have to be scared, yeah?"

Her eyes were bright and the tears were pooling. He sighed. If only he had waited outside the arcade... He could have stopped it. None of this would have happened. El wouldn't have been terrified. The whole thing could have been avoided.

Brenner would still come for her. If it wasn't today, it'll be tomorrow, a voice whispered.

When he pulled her close, she melted into him, pressing her face on his shoulder. He held her tighter.

"Listen, kid, I can't change what happened to you in the past but... I'll do my damnest best to make sure nothing bad happens to you now. You know why?"

"Because you're not Papa..."

"Yeah, I'm not him. But that's not it," he said. "Remember what I said when I told you about those papers I signed? I'm not gonna let anything happen to you. You and I, we're in this together."

"Forever," she said, remembering their conversation

"Yeah, so I don't want you scared. You should never be, with me. Sometimes.... Sometimes we're gonna get angry, like we did before, you're gonna shout at me when you're angry and I'm gonna shout right back at you but when it's all done, it's still going to be you and

me. I – " he swallowed. He couldn't remember the last time he said those words. To Sarah, maybe. "I love you and when you love someone, you take care of them."

She nodded, stepping back from him a little to look at him. She kissed his stubble cheek.

"Me too," she said and he understood. He ruffled her hair. "We leave him here."

She gestured at Brenner's unconscious body.

"As much as I'd like to let some other truck roll him over, best if we bring him in to the station. Help me out."

She pulled on a leg when she saw Hopper doing the same, and he dumped Benner at the back of his truck, not caring if his head hit anything. He tossed her a smile in the passenger seat. In the middle of the drive back, she reached out for his hand and held it all way to the Byers' house.

"I'll be back soon. Gotta take care of that," he pointed over his shoulder to the truck where Brenner's body was.

El nodded and went in without a word.

Joyce stood staring at him but he shook his head.

"Tell you later," he mouthed, driving away.

Let me know what you think!

5. 1985

Requested by anon: Here's a prompt: Jopper + new year's eve celebration

1985

Hopper couldn't remember the last time he had celebrated New Year. Before he lost Sarah probably, when he actually had something to look forward to when a fresh year came. When he returned to Hawkins in '79, his life had spiralled out of control too much for such trivial things like New Year celebrations to be a feature.

Letting '84 dissolve behind him without much fanfare was more than acceptable to him except now, there was El.

Despite her special psychic abilities that set her apart, Hopper actually wanted her to have a life from here on out that would be as normal as possible. And normal teenagers celebrate New Year.

It started then with a simple *'you could invite Mike'*. That somehow reached Will's ears who in turn talked about it to Dustin and Lucas. Of course, Lucas told Max and Dustin... Well, he told Steve about it.

(Hopper still wasn't quite sure how *that* friendship came to be but fighting alternate dimension monsters together probably bonded them).

"I heard it from Will. He said Mike told him. You're gonna ask me how Mike knows right? That's 'cause El asked him to come for Chief Hopper's party."

"I don't buy it," Steve snorted derisively. "The Chief's known for being a party pooper, always shutting down parties whenever one of us threw it. Cause we're too loud or some shit like that."

Dustin rolled his eyes and shot back, "if you don't believe me then come see for yourself, asshole."

"His gotta be boring," Steve contemplated. "What's the Chief listening to anyway? Does he even know music?"

When Joyce's car finally emerged through the woods in front of his cabin, Hopper already had five kids in there. Will walked up to his door as Joyce trailed after her son.

"You're here so you got to stay."

He kept his voice steady so she wouldn't know that he *needed* her around but if the way one side of her lip curled up in obvious amusement was anything to go by, Joyce could see through his bullshit.

"They're yours now," she teased.

"Oh, come on," he let out a breath, opting now to be open about his struggle. "I can't deal with them all on my own. What am I gonna do until midnight?"

She shrugged, not letting him off the hook that easily.

"Bet my hat you have nothing better to do anyway."

Joyce glared. It was adorable that she thought he would back down just because a five foot tall woman was glaring at him.

Hopper opened the door wider, grinning.

"You're insufferable. I have laundries to fold, you know, and I was looking forward to a nice, *quiet* night."

"No, you don't. You'll spend that time, in your own head, worrying."

The look she shot him told him that he was right. The moment she came in, El came forward to give her a hug which she returned with such warmth.

Joyce took in the sight of his house. Hopper had *tried* to make the house look a little festive back during Christmas. He didn't think he had succeeded much but there was a Christmas tree which El had a good time decorating and to him that was all that mattered.

Since the six children were occupying the sitting room in an intense game of Dungeons & Dragons while the television was turned on for

background noise, they both retreated to the kitchen.

"Got nothing fancy," he grumbled, tossing her a can of soda.

"Oh, well, I clearly made a mistake. I should have just gone to the Wheelers. Karen would have given me wine or champagne. *That*, I imagine, is how New Year is celebrated."

Hopper crinkled his nose. "You're not that funny."

"That wasn't what you thought of me back when you were sitting next to me in detention," she said slyly.

"I was young *and* stupid," he retorted, taking the soda back from her to exchange it for beer but she swatted his hand and took back the soda.

She stood there in his kitchen, her eyes twinkling in mirth from their exchange, and a thought flashed briefly through his mind – *Lonnie's an idiot*.

Close to 11.00 pm, Nancy and Jonathan dropped by, surprising both adults especially Hopper who firstly, clearly did not recall inviting them and secondly, at their age, he would have been at a party one of the high school kids would have thrown.

"Powell broke it up. There was a fight," Jonathan explained.

Jonathan and Nancy shuffled awkwardly inside. The last time they were here, they had been trying to get the Mind Flayer out of Will, not a pleasant memory to associate with a place.

Returning back to the kitchen, Hopper's eyes strayed to Will.

"Your boy looks... healthier."

"He does, doesn't he? He needs to eat a little bit more but I'm afraid he will always just be scrawny," Joyce smiled, rubbing her hand up and down her folded arms.

Sometimes, Hopper couldn't help thinking that she was trying to make herself as small as possible, to shrink away from the world until

it was only her and the two boys, someplace she could keep them safe.

"He still has nightmares," she gave up that information out of the blue. "Nothing as bad as the episode two months ago but the nightmares didn't stop."

"El has them too," he informed her, watching her take a sip from the soda. "Dealing with kids having nightmares about aliens... I think that's going to be our new normal, Joyce."

She snorted loudly, choking on her drink. Hopper handed her a napkin. The sound had attracted Jonathan's attention and he shot them both a curious glance, his eyes shifting from his mother to Hopper. He said nothing.

At some point from when his brother was taken to now, Jonathan had come to accept that Hopper was going to be a strange part of his life.

Ever since El, Hopper had been over at the Byers' place a couple of times to drop her off when he had to work night and when he picked El up in the morning, they often stayed, at Joyce's behest for breakfast – him and El, together with the three Byers. It felt a little dysfunctional but it also *almost* felt as if they were a family, one that could make it work. Hopper refused to dwell on such thoughts. Nothing will come out of it.

"Do you really think it's gone, Hop? That Mind – Mind Flayer..."

He let out a breath. He wasn't planning on having this sort of discussion today but today being the last day of the year.... A lot of reflection going on. A good, nice man would have taken pains to assure her and comfort her that the danger was gone, even if it meant lying to her, but Hopper didn't truly believe that they were out of the woods. He didn't speak of this to anyone, not even to Joyce for fear of worrying her needlessly, but truthfully, a part of him was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Getting El settled to a life here in Hawkins had been a challenge but it was a good one. Christmas had been quiet and enjoyable. In less

than an hour, they would be ushering in the New Year and yet, he couldn't shake the feeling that something might go wrong somewhere. At any moment now, something would fuck him over. He was sure of it.

It was a depressing thought which was why he kept it to himself and he hated how vulnerable he felt.

"She closed the gate, Joyce, but that thing... it's still out there, right? It's still.... We didn't kill it. We didn't end the threat. We just trapped it there."

He heard the strangled intake of breath and he wished he hadn't opened his mouth. Instinctively, like he had done that night on the Snow Ball, Hopper put an arm around her, the cigarette he was smoking to warm himself up, dangled from his finger. Just like that night, Joyce leaned into him.

"But the gate's closed," he went on, dropping a kiss to her head, a silent apology. "Maybe I'm just being paranoid."

"You have a cause to be. You and me, both. What if it comes back for Will or Jane? Oh god, Hopper," she fisted his shirt in distress, "I can't go through that again. I can't watch Will go through that again."

"Hey, hey, hey," he squeezed her arm lightly. "Nothing's happened but if something goes after them, then we do it together like we have before. Nothing's changed, Joyce, I'm still in your corner."

There was a time before when he had been sceptical but Joyce didn't have to worry about that guy anymore. He was here a hundred percent. Even if his kid's life wasn't on the line, he would still be here for Joyce.

She glanced up then and the smile she gave him.... It made him want to do things to her, most of which, would be inappropriate in a house filled with children.

He would have even kissed her if her boys were not currently sitting just outside the kitchen or if Steve Harrington had not choose that moment to walk through his front door causing a rippled of

excitement.

"You made it!" Dustin exclaimed.

"I heard here's where the monster-killing squad is so," he shrugged, "here I am."

Hopper poked his head out of the kitchen just then to really make sure it was the Harrington boy in his cabin.

"Hey, Chief, nice party," he chuckled, looking for the alcohol. "Very... kid-friendly."

Hopper rolled his eyes and retreated back to the kitchen where Joyce was still leaning against the counter, watching him with a hint of fondness in her eyes. At least that was what he liked to think it was, that some part of her was fond of him. It made him feel desperate but with El around he kept thinking – *wishing* – that he had been given a second chance and that would include having a second chance with Joyce.

When the countdown started, he allowed Joyce to tug on his hand and followed her lead out. They hung behind the group.

"3," Nancy's voice rang out.

The others picked up after her, "2!"

"Happy New Year," the raucous cried broke through his cabin.

Hopper smiled, he couldn't help it. Being here in this room with a woman and children who had gone through hell and survived.... They deserved this celebration.

"Happy New Year, Hop," Joyce stood on tip toes to kiss his cheek.

It was ridiculous how short she was and yet still so determined to reach him. He leaned down slightly and the feel of her lips brushing against his stubble jaw made him closed his eyes. He reached out to touch her hip, just to hold her steady, nothing at all to do with the fact that lately, he felt quite a need to touch her.

When he straightened up, he caught sight of El and Mike, and he was quick to place a hand on El's shoulder. He stared down at the boy.

Looking chastised, Mike cleared his throat, changed direction and much like Joyce had, kissed El on the cheek instead.

"Here's to a monster free year!" Steve raised his own can of soda.

Hopper could toast to that. Remembering their earlier conversation, he glanced down at Joyce next to him. "We can hope," he spoke softly.

"Time for firecrackers," Lucas announced and before he could get a word in, the kids were running out of his cabin followed by the three teenagers at a languid pace.

Joyce shook her head. "Hop, this ragtag team... I can hardly believe they took down a species from an alternate dimension."

"*The winner might just surprise you yet* – it'll make for a good tagline for a movie."

He was rewarded by Joyce's delightful laugh and in the middle of the night, in this New Year, it was a nice sound to hear. Whatever 1985 had to offer, he was ready to face it with El and with Joyce, and whatever it was they had between them.

I was aiming for light and fluff but it got a little dark but still, I hope that was an enjoyable read :)

6. BMX

Requested by anon: Hopper teaches El to ride a bike pleaseeee

BMX

At some point after things had settled down and it was safe for El to be out in public, Hopper came to the realisation that he couldn't keep ferrying the kid to school. And he certainly couldn't keep up with a teenager's rather free schedule of visiting friends and arcade and movie at random time during the day and weekend.

He had enjoyed driving her around to the Wheelers and Byers because he felt *needed* and it gave him a reason, a pretence, to see Joyce now and again but he really wasn't down with being El's personal chauffeur. With that, he decided, it was time to give El freedom of mobility.

He bought her a bicycle; a white and blue BMX model that was just released in '84 because he was told it was all the rage nowadays.

Her face had split into a huge grin and when she gazed up at him with that expectant look in her eyes, a question poised on her lips, he felt a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

"Mine?"

"Yeah, kid, yours," Hopper ruffled her hair affectionately. "Wanna give it a go?"

She approached the bicycle, reverently touching the blue saddle and handlebars, down to its white metal body. Her finger rang the bell and he watched as her face lighted up in delight.

"How... I don't know how," she said. "Mike always take me around."

Hopper blinked. Why he thought she knew how to ride was beyond him. It didn't occur to him at all. He just *assumed* that she knew how to.

Should he have bought one with training wheels? *No*, he thought, he learnt how to ride without training wheels.

"Alright," Hopper breathed out. "I'll teach you. It's not that difficult once get the hang of it."

He looked around.

The woods surrounding his cabin was the least appropriate place to teach. It might soften the blow a little if she fell on the ground but it would be difficult to paddle and she needed to learn to paddle to stay up right.

So with a jerk of his head, El climbed into his truck as he loaded the bicycle at the back. He drove her out of there and found a suitable place, a smooth tarmac road with little traffic. A quiet place at the edge of town.

Hopper adjusted the saddle for her height and patted it.

"The way my father taught me was like this," Hopper started as he stood behind the bicycle, helping the girl on the bike and holding her steady under the armpits. The back wheel was clamped between his legs. "He stood behind and made sure I was steady. I ain't gonna let you go until you're ready, alright?"

"Alright. Are you going to push me?"

"You have to start paddling, kid. It'll move then. You've seen Mike and the others when they're cycling, right?"

"Yes," she nodded and started pushing paddles, in circles. "Oh!" she exclaimed when the bicycle began moving.

"There you go," Hopper encouraged, holding her lightly on the sides and following from behind. "Now you got to learn how to stop. You use the brakes to do that. It's that one there," he pointed. "And once you press on that, you want to just put a leg out on the ground to balance yourself. You got it?"

"Easy," El declared and did as he told her.

She started pedalling again, and slowly, he let go of her when he thought that she became to gain some confidence. El started leaning sideways and promptly fell to the ground. She dusted herself and got up, grinning at Hopper to tell him that she was alright.

"Again," she commanded to which Hopper indulged.

Once again, he took his place behind the bicycle, wheels between the legs as she got on it and held her steady until she was ready to start pedalling again.

It took them a couple of tries and each time she managed to go further and further without him having to hold on to her. Once, she became a little overexcited and braked violently, causing the bicycle to jerk forward.

Forty minutes in, she could start off on her own without his help. She cycled and the bike wobbled a little but Hopper stood at the sides, arms crossed as he watched.

When she completed a whole round without falling once, Hopper gave her a high five. He let her cycle more rounds just to bolster her confidence and then called it a day.

"It doesn't mean you can ride this anywhere you want," he warned as they drove back. "Only to school and back to the cabin. Those boys have been riding since they were kids, you're just starting out so I want you take it easy. You understand?"

She nodded.

"Road's dangerous," he added when she said nothing to assure him that she would really listen to him.

Two weeks into getting her new bicycle, Hopper nearly had a heart attack one afternoon when he saw her racing with the boys and Max. He was in his police truck at the intersection, on his way to the other side of town to settle the old pumpkin rivalry, when the six kids rode passed him. He knew those boys were a menace on their bicycles and now they were dragging his girl along.

"What did I tell you, kid?" he shouted out of his rolled down window.

At the sound of his voice, El stopped and glanced over her shoulder. Her eyes widened when she saw him.

"Sorry," she smiled meekly but took off on her bike to join the others, disappearing round the bend before he could get a word in.

This is the image of Eleven's bike: </bikes/haro/95817> :)

7. Broken

Requested by anon: Can you please do one post season 2 where joyce keeps trying to avoid hopper but then gives in eventually?

Broken

When Joyce Byers woke up one morning with a heavy arm slung over her midsection and realised that there was a very naked Hopper next to her, three weeks after Jane had shut the Gate, she had been horrified.

She lay there frozen, staring at a brown spot on her wall, wondering how they got here. The initial horror gave way to confusion before the overwhelming guilt washed over her and *that* made her choke.

Bob, she gasped and covered her mouth. He was *just* killed trying to protect her and Will. He sacrificed himself for her family and how did she repay him?

By sleeping with another man.

While it was true that she didn't actually planned for this and that it just happened, it was still.... She threw the covers back and started scrounging the room, looking for her discarded clothes.

"Hey."

His voice was gruff from sleep and she paused. Joyce turned to look behind, forcing a smile on her face. Hopper was propped on his elbow, watching her warily.

"Joyce – "

"It was a mistake," she blurted out. "I can't – this isn't... "

Joyce took in a shuddering breath.

She liked him. She enjoyed his company, sharing a cigarette like old times when it got too tough. She liked having him around and she

found comfort in knowing that if she met a brick wall, she could rely on him to stand next to her and bring the wall down together. He was her cornerstone and lately, her strength.

She couldn't destroy what they have. This friendship between them.... She didn't want to ruin it by complicating it with sex or... or emotions.

"You have to go," she dumped his clothes on the bed, all the while avoiding his gaze. She couldn't look at him. There was something in his gaze, this intense longing that always made her a little weak in the knees. There were also always random flashes of vulnerability just swirling in the depth that made her want to wrap his big frame in her arms just so she could comfort him. "The boys will ask questions and I – I don't know... You have to go, *please*."

The moment Hopper heard her plea, he dropped his head and let out a breath. "Alright," he said.

Joyce stood in the middle of the bedroom, an arm hugging herself as she watched him gather his clothes and put on his pants. When he was dressed, he stopped in front of her, tugging on her hand to stop her from abusing the nail she was biting in her nervousness.

"Relax, Joyce," he spoke low under his breath. "I'm leaving."

"This should be easy for you," she said without a thought.

"Excuse me?"

"This," she gestured at them and the bed. "Leaving after the deed is done... You're used to it. It means nothing."

Something flashed in his eyes and his face scrunched. "Is that what you think?"

It was her turn to look confused. Everyone knew that after his return to Hawkins in '79, he had been sleeping around with any women who would have him. What this was wouldn't and *shouldn't* be any different than those strings of one-night stands he had. He wouldn't think anything of this, she tried to assure herself. This was something he was used to. She was just another woman.

"Hop, I – "

"It's fine, Joyce. You have your opinion of me, same as everyone else in this town."

His face was closed off, unreadable, but she could *hear* the disappointment in his voice.

Surely, this didn't mean anything to him?

She couldn't afford to have anything more between them. She was grieving for the man who loved and whom she had come to love. She was worried about Will who still woke up in the middle of the night screaming from terror. She was worried about Jonathan who stayed awake when it was dark out because he was afraid once he fell asleep, something would come for his brother.

This left her with very little time for Hopper even if she wanted to. And that was something she had been trying to bury for so long. Her boys were her priorities.

"If anything happens you call me," he told her.

She nodded mutely and watched him leave her house and then she collapsed, head buried in her hands.

For weeks after, she focused all of her attention on Jonathan and Will. She worked shifts and tried not to think too much about Hopper. She would see his police truck slow down when it passed by the store she worked, as if the driver inside was contemplating about coming in before changing his mind and driving off.

Once, Will informed her that Hopper dropped by after school while she was working to check in on them and fixed the leaking pipe in the toiler. She had been meaning to get to it but it slipped her mind.

"He asked about you," Will said.

"Oh, what did he want?"

One night during a heavy rainstorm, twenty-nine days after that incident, not that she was really keeping count, he came knocking on

her door with Jane standing next to him.

"There's a chain collision, bad pile up, at the edge of town. I got to go down to the scene and back to the station. Could you – Could you keep an eye on El until I get back? You're the only one I trust," the last part was muttered under his breath.

"Of course," she nodded and ushered Jane in.

When he came back nine hours later while they were having breakfast, tired and bleary eyed, Joyce took pity on him. She made him a cup of coffee and Jonathan prepared a plate for him.

"Was it bad?" Jane asked.

"Yeah," Hopper nodded. "Three injured. They're in the hospital."

When Jonathan left to meet Nancy, Will invited Jane to his room to show her some of his record collections that Jonathan had given him. It made Joyce felt a little self-conscious of herself the moment she realised that she was alone with Hopper.

This was Hopper, she reminded herself. Things between them should never feel awkward. How long was she going to avoid him? She had no one else apart from Hopper and occasionally Karen and even so, Karen didn't know her the way Hopper did.

She reached out for his hand on the table. Hopper stared at it, as if the simple touch was something so completely foreign to him.

"I can look over Jane for a few more hours if you need to go home and sleep."

"Yeah?" he lifted his eyes. "That's nice of you."

"Well," she managed a smile. "You've had my back all these while, it's time I have yours."

His brows furrowed together. She understood. After the way she reacted, this wasn't what he was expecting from her this morning.

"Look, Joyce, I ain't sorry about what happened. It wasn't a mistake,

not to me. The timing was off, I admit, but I – I get it why you're pulling away and avoiding me. I know – I know you love him and – "

"Hop, let's not – "

"Point is... if you don't want anything like that to happen then it won't. You got your hands full, I can see that, and I don't want to be one of your problems. I just...."

"I missed you, Hopper," she admitted. "What we have is good enough for me. Can we not ruin it?"

"Yeah, sure, yeah," he nodded, smiling a little.

As if to seal the point, he lighted up a cigarette and handed it to her.

She had never had to hold Hopper at an arm's length. He knew all there was to know about her and her family, from the messy divorce with Lonnie to the government conspiracy that dragged her son in when everyone else in town had questioned her mental health. She could talk to him about anything. He had already seen her at her most vulnerable and he remained by her side at every turn. She trusted him and she held on to the steadfast belief that this was one relationship, one friendship, she absolutely did not want to screw up and they both had an ugly track record of screwing things up.

So as they sat there in her kitchen puffing away, she tried to ignore the way Hopper was looking at her. They were both lonely, and he might be looking for a way to fill his life but she wasn't sure if *she* was the answer.

How could one broken person fix another?

8. Temporary Fix

Requested by anon: Hello! I am in love with your Jopper fics! Can you write one where Hopper accidentally confesses his feelings for Joyce while they are in a heated argument? Thank you :)

Temporary Fix

The porch swing creaked under Hopper's weight. His gaze flew to the screw on the ceiling warily but the swing held, and he smirked to himself, thinking of the swing in relation to Joyce. She was tough and unrelenting, no matter what was piled on her shoulder.

"Does it help?"

Her soft voice carried in the quiet night and it drew his attention from the ceiling screw holding the swing back to her.

"Huh, what?"

She was looking at him as if expecting him to have some, if not all, the answers to her problems right now.

"The drinking and the women... Does it help? With the coping."

His brows furrowed at the oddity of her question. Then it occurred to him that she might be asking for herself and that it had nothing to do with her being concern over him.

"It's a temporary fix," he muttered. Despite what people think, he wasn't actually proud of what he'd done. He was seeking a connection, something, anything not to fall into the despair that Sarah left behind. "Wouldn't advise it."

Will Byers had been found and brought back from the Upside Down. Joyce had her son back but Hopper could tell that she was still highly on edge; that her anxiety issues were still very much there. If anything, she was even more paranoid. She had asked Hopper to install a double lock on her door. She was crowding her son. She was calling Hopper at random hours in the night, sometimes not even saying anything but she would listen to him talk her through her

nightmares about monsters, portals and alternate dimensions. He didn't mind it much but it tended to wake El up since she was a light sleeper.

But El wasn't something he could talk about to Joyce either. He was trying to protect them both.

"Jonathan.... He was saying that I should..." Joyce wrung her hands together and then started to pick on the cuticles of her nails. He learnt from their time back in high school that that was a sign that she was nervous so he covered her hand with his own, stilling her actions. "He said I should go out, maybe with Karen and Karen, she said, I need to expand my human connection. She suggested the bar," she snorted suddenly. "What would I do there?"

He knew what Karen was suggesting – that she relax and learn to have fun outside of her family. Hopper took a long drag from his cigarette and let out a breath.

"It won't work, Joyce. It – "

"Do you think they can tell that I'm lonely? Even if I do, I didn't think it mattered but sometimes I wake up at night and I feel so alone."

That admission caught him off guard. Hopper stared at her, the cigarette wedged between his lips.

"I love my children. I love them but there's a different kind of human contact that There's a – There's a hole in here," she gestured vaguely at her chest, "that just longs for...."

"Intimacy?" he supplied, not really sure of himself or where this conversation was heading.

"Companionship...."

"That's bullshit, Joyce. I'm here and I – I'm *here*," he stressed, not really sure why he was suddenly agitated.

"I know you are but you shouldn't have to ... I don't know how to put it, Hop," she smiled sadly. "Everyone else... They think I'm insane. They look at me like I have lost my mind when all I did, I did it for

Will and I would do it again. Wouldn't any mother have done the same?"

"You've never cared about what people think," Hopper frowned.

"No, I never did but it also meant that nobody wants to have anything to do with me. Which means even if I go to the bar like Karen suggests, nothing will come out of it. Maybe I am meant to be on my own," she chuckled bitterly, "just me and my boys."

He wouldn't be so sure of that. Men, he thought, when it was offered to them freely, they would take it. What Joyce wanted – *crave* – wasn't so insane. It is human nature to want to be loved and accepted, to have a connection with someone, to *feel*. He just never thought they would be sitting here on her porch swing talking about this.

"The last time anyone even touched me, it was Lonnie, before the divorce. I wasn't even feeling it, you know. I was just lying there, letting him take what he wants because it's easier."

Hopper clenched his jaws. The last thing he wanted tonight was to think about her and Lonnie. He didn't want to picture Joyce and Lonnie in the bedroom, and if he was here right now, Hopper would have punched that asshole in the throat. He had no idea what he was missing letting Joyce go.

"You're not in the right frame of mind," he interjected, just to prevent her from talking about Lonnie. He saw the sting in her eyes at his cutting remark. Like she said, out of everyone, he had always believed in her and to dismiss her like that... "Screw what Karen says. Maybe that's what *she* wants but can't 'cause she's married. You don't go out there and sleep in some random stranger's bed just to feel *something*. You don't."

"That's rich coming from you," she snorted.

Hopper turned to her sharply, grabbing her elbow.

"Don't, Joyce," he growled.

She pulled it away, glaring hard at him.

"Pot. Kettle. Black," she hissed.

He half-expected her to storm back into her house and slam the door in his face but she remained seated next to him on the swing, roughly snatching his pack from him to light a stick for herself.

"You'll come out from that feeling a lot of worst," he stayed his ground, blatantly refusing to let it up.

"Shut up, Hop."

"I'm gonna throw the guy in jail."

Joyce scoffed, giving him a side eye. "You can't do that."

"Watch me," he challenged.

"What is to you?" she retorted, finally losing her patience. "Why do you care what I do?"

"Of course I fuckin' care, Joyce. I'm not gonna stand here and watch you go around trying to fix a hole in you –"

"I'm not talking about sleeping around. Just one time that –"

"I told you I'm here," he shouted, standing up and away from her. "Why can't that be enough for you?"

The words slipped past his lips before he could stop himself. *Shit*, he cursed.

Joyce was staring at him open-mouthed. The creases between her brows deepened as she tried to process what he just said. Hopper was towering over her, breathing heavily. His pupils were blown wide open, the cigarette dangling from his finger and the now empty beer can crushed in his other hand.

He wished he could take it back.

"What do you mean, Hop?"

He blinked and breathed in the cold air. It felt like fire in his lungs,

and the unexplainable ache in his chest magnified.

"Nothing," he shook his head, rubbing his face tiredly. "Nothing – just forget I said it."

"Hop...."

"You know Bob...." he asked, keeping his voice flat and even, as if it wasn't silently painful for him to get the words out. "Bob the Brain, works at Radioshack... I went by last week, you know, robbery case."

"Yeah... I think I remember him, sort-of."

They knew Bob from high school. Always alone, quiet. Hopper didn't really notice him much while in school but he grew up nice and gentle, sometimes a little too eager but he was *nice*, kind-hearted even, if the way he readily dropped the charges against the teenager who stole from his store was anything to go by.

Bob wasn't damaged like him with his list of scorned women, and his dependency on prescription drugs that he was trying hard to get in control now that El was with him.

If Joyce was feeling alone and lonely, and instead of her sleeping with one of those idiots from the bar, at least Bob would treat her right, and he was so far removed from the mess at Hawkins Lab. Bob, Hopper figured, would be sweet on her and attentive. It was what she deserved. Not someone like him, someone broken. Hopper had nothing to offer other than to be there for her and he was starting to think that it wasn't enough.

Hopper had El to think about now. He had Hawkins Lab to deal with and make sure that nothing would make its way into his town.

Besides, he thought, shouldn't it be someone whole who should step in just to fix someone who was broken?

"You might want to call him," he dropped Bob's name card on the empty swing seat he just vacated.

She looked confused by this sudden change of attitude and conversation. Hopper said nothing, just gathered his stuff and

stormed towards his truck.

"Hop!"

He paused, his truck door half-open.

"I don't think he's – "

"Give him a chance, Joyce," Hopper turned, the words felt sour on his tongue but he just wanted her *happy*.

9. The Ex

1. Hi! Could you write something where Joyce and Lonnie are married and having an awful fight and one of the kids calls the police department since they aren't able to stop it and Hopper comes?

2. Hopper saves Joyce from being attacked by her ex. She breaks down in his arms, and he takes care of her.

3. Hey, I'm not sure if you are taking requests at the moment but I thought I would just leave mine here: Lonnie comes back (whether to get back with Joyce or just be a j*** I don't care) and we get to see Hopper get protective of Joyce. Anyways keep up the amazing work! I may or may not check on this story every morning before I head to work to have something to look forward to when I get home ;)

a/n: Since I had a few prompt requests circling around Lonnie, Joyce & Hopper, I decided to do them all together which resulted in this three times, one time thing which grew out of hand. It took me days to write and I'm happy it's done!

The Ex

The three times Jim Hopper stood between Lonnie and Joyce, and the one time he didn't.

1980

The door to Jonathan's bedroom slammed closed. Outside, in the living room, Joyce stood her ground, glaring at the man in front of her.

"We needed the money for the boys, Lonnie," Joyce screamed. Her hand was fisted at her side as she tried to control this anger bubbling and clawing out of her. "School reopens in three weeks!"

"Will you calm down already?" Lonnie's voice was sharp and loud. "There's three weeks – I'll get it back."

Their argument and shouting matches were legendary ever since high school. Back then, people thought it was endearing that two forces of nature that often clashed could still be together but they were young and their arguments were *petty*, something that could easily be casted aside, something you could close one eye to without any consequences. The make-up sex at the back of Lonnie's car certainly did wonders to smooth ruffle feathers.

Except now...

Now they were both adults with two children and things were real. There were consequences. His gambling and mounting debts were not something Joyce could sweep under the rug. She worked double shifts whenever she could, leaving her sons with babysitters, just to have something to feed this family, cloth them and send them to school.

The last thing she needed was to come home to find out that Lonnie had used the money to place bets in order to pay off some of his debts... only to lose the bets. It was a vicious cycle and she was tired.

She was so exhausted.

"That's what you *always* say and you *never* get it back," she gritted her teeth. "You're a fucking scum, Lonnie."

She turned to walk away but Lonnie grabbed her by the elbow.

"Hey," he snarled, his face turning ugly. "You don't get to say shit like that to *me*."

"I can say whatever I want to say, Lonnie. *I'm* the one pulling all the weight around here. You're out there losing *my* money on gambling and on your whores. Oh, I know about them," Joyce scoffed when Lonnie's eyes widened imperceptibly at that accusation. "You should be ashamed of yourself. They're young and you're..."

She gestured at him only to end up shaking her head. There was no use talking to him. It was always just in one ear and out another. Besides, hadn't she told herself years ago when Jonathan was ten that Lonnie would only end up disappointing her?

"I'm what...?"

The obvious challenge for her to finish her sentence flashed through his eyes.

"You're trash."

And wasn't that the truth? She kept having to throw him out only for him to come crawling back because *'Joyce, I need some money'* or *'Babe, you have to bail me outta this'*.

"Fuck you, Joyce," Lonnie spat, shoving her roughly away from him.

The unexpected force caused her to stumble and crashed on the table. The bottles of vodka and whiskey shattered to the floor, the beer cans clattered noisily. When she tried to push herself up, she hissed in pain, realising belatedly that she had cut her arm on one of the broken shards.

She looked up at the sounds of hurried footsteps to see her children running out of Jonathan's room. Her oldest took one look at the scene and stepped between his parents. Will was staring at the cut on her arm, eyes wide and in shocked. Instinctively, Joyce covered her wound, more to protect Will than herself.

"Get out of my way, boy," Lonnie growled. Jonathan only clenched his jaws which made Lonnie laughed in his face. "You look so much like your mother like that – thought you'd be more like me."

With that, he pushed passed Jonathan towards Joyce, sending Will scrambling away. Lonnie towered over her.

"I told you I'd get it back, Joyce," he said quietly, crouching down so they were eye to eye.

He reached out to touch her arm but she pulled away, glaring at him defiantly.

"You didn't have to get all pissy. None of this would have happened... right?"

She chuckled bitterly. He always had a way of turning it around and

making it *her* fault. It was never his. It was always something *she* did that made him act the way he acted. Joyce pushed on his chest when he tried to help her up.

"Don't be a bitch now," he warned, keeping his voice low.

"I will when you stop being such a bastard. I want you to get me all that money back by tomorrow you hear me? By tomorrow, Lonnie! I need to get them new shoes and books."

"If I said I'll get it then I'll get - "

He stopped abruptly at the sound of the police siren approaching the house. Lonnie looked behind his shoulder at the two boys.

"Who called the fucking cops?"

"I – It was me," Will stammered, peeking out from behind the wall. "I was scared and you – you were hurting mom and - "

"Hawkins Chief of Police, open the door."

The pounding on the door was loud, insistent and had the attention of all four Byers.

Lonnie shot Will a disgruntled look, muttering an expletive that sounded suspiciously like '*fag*' under his breath which made Joyce kicked him on his leg as he stood up from where he was crouched next to her. At the door, he pulled it open.

"Hey, Chief," Lonnie grunted.

"We had a call. Just here to check it out."

"Oh, yeah, about that... See, the kid, he was just fooling around. You know how kids are."

"Fooling around... Wasn't the impression I had, Byers. Your kid sounded scared."

Joyce could imagine the look on Lonnie's face; could picture the way his eyes twitched like it always did when he tried to suppress the

annoyance he was feeling.

"This one's an oddball. He's scared of everything," Lonnie snorted. "You're just wasting your time here, Jimmy."

Joyce bit her lip. If there was one sure fire way to annoy Hopper, it was to call him by *that* nickname.

"Step back, Byers. Let me take a look inside. I'll need to talk to your son, make sure everything's fine and if it is, I'll file a quick statement to that effect. The quicker this is done, the faster I'll be out of here.

Still, Lonnie stood steadfast by the door, refusing to budge an inch.

"Come on, Jimmy, don't tell me you've never fought with your wife? You must have that's why she's an ex now, isn't she?" Lonnie snickered when he saw the way Hopper's eyes hardened just as he clenched his jaws. "Joyce and I... We had some petty quarrel, alright. Nothing for you cops to get involved in."

Ignoring him completely, Hopper raised his voice so he could be heard, "Hey, kid, you alright in there?"

"Yeah," Will answered, his voice shaking a little, "but my mom is bleeding!"

Hopper arched an eyebrow.

"Move back."

Lonnie hung his head, exhaled in irritation but stepped aside this time round. Hopper stepped into the room, his presence suddenly felt large and looming in their small space. Still, the sudden feeling of security that Joyce felt right then was overwhelming.

Hopper took in the sight of the living room. His gaze landed on Joyce in an instant, standing next to the broken coffee table, cradling her injured arm.

"Joyce," Hopper started, taking a step forward. "Are you okay?"

"She fell," Lonnie shrugged.

Joyce looked away, fixing her stare on her worn out shoes, suddenly ashamed to face Hopper's intense scrutinisation. They had been quite a pair – she and Hopper. They had been uninhibited, free and loud. They had done what they damn well please regardless of anyone or anything. Look at her now... In a loveless marriage, trying hard to meet ends meet.

When Hopper turned to face Lonnie, it was then that Joyce raised her head, realising at once that Hopper's big frame had effectively blocked Lonnie from her.

"What – she just so happen to fall?"

"Yeah," Lonnie replied, unconcerned. "Clumsy, ain't you, babe?"

Still keeping an eye on Lonnie, Hopped addressed the boys. "What happened, kids?"

Between the nervous stammers and stutters, Jonathan and Will managed to tell him of the argument they could hear through the door and how Will had been so scared he had called the police.

"Alright, Byers, you're coming with - "

Hopper stopped mid-sentence when he felt shaking hand on his arm.

"I just need the clinic, that's all."

"You can press charges. You can let him rot in jail." Hopper spoke to her under his breath so Lonnie wouldn't pick up on it. "You should - "

"I don't need another man to tell me what to do," Joyce cut him off. "I got it."

Hopper said nothing. If the side glance was anything to go by, he didn't look like he believed her but she made her decision and it was out of his hands.

Two weeks later, as he stood in front of the counter she was manning, waiting for her to bag the pack of beers and cigarettes, she told him quietly.

"I'm divorcing him."

Hopper glanced up but she wasn't looking at him.

"Good," he muttered. "Horowitz is a better name than Byers."

1982

It had taken a full year and numerous shouting matches before Lonnie finally signed the divorce papers. By the time it was finalised, her anxiety that skyrocketed and she had been smoking a pack a day much to Jonathan's worry. But the boy had been her buoy, always making her sure she kept her head up, whipping meals for his brother when she was too distraught to even tell salt from sugar and taking on a job despite her disagreement the moment he realised that whatever money Joyce had, she was spending it on legal fees for the divorce.

It was summer and with school out, Lonnie had taken Will to a baseball game. Jonathan had gone along if only to be there for his brother.

That was yesterday.

Her ex-husband had promised to have them both back by this afternoon, not that his word meant shit, but Joyce had held on to that regardless. Now, the sun was already setting and her sons were still not home.

Naturally, she had called Lonnie multiples times but the phone went unanswered. So she finally decided to head down to the police station.

"I think he's kidnapped my sons," Joyce declared, barging into the Chief's office.

Hopper looked up from his desk and then behind Joyce to where Flo was standing there, looking at him with an apologetic shrug.

He frowned, annoyed that his afternoon was interrupted just when his shift was about to end. "What?"

"You heard me. That bastard Lonnie took my sons and they're not back yet."

"Uh, Joyce," he pinched the bridge of his nose, "did you call him?"

"Of course, I did, Hopper," she huffed. "I need to file a missing person _"

"That's not how it works. They're with a parent and - "

"They're not home yet."

"They're not but you know where they are," Hopper argued, "and who they're with."

"Are you even listening to me, Hop? They're supposed to be back by now but they're not. Is there anything this station can do? Send a patrol car out or – "

"I can't send a patrol car out to Indianapolis, Joyce. There's a waiting period for – "

She gritted her teeth.

"I know they're with their father, Hop, but what if – what if he's not allowing them to leave? Or – Or he's keeping them there to spite me?"

"He won't want to keep those kids around longer than necessary," Hopper tried to comfort her. "He'll have them back. Why don't you – uh – why don't you head home and try to get some sleep?"

"Is that it? That's your big advise? Get some sleep?"

With a huff, Joyce stormed out. Hopper stared after her, debating with himself if it really was worth the effort. In the end, and with a loud curse, he grabbed his hat and ran after her.

"You're *not* driving out there," he rapped on her window. "I'll go. I can't send a patrol car but I can go, I'm off duty."

"Why?" Joyce looked up at him, squinting against the bright glare

from the lamp post.

He couldn't answer her but the last time he had seen Joyce with Lonnie Byers, she was bleeding from her arm. He didn't want to know what she would or could do to provoke Byers in the name of her children.

"Head back home. I'll get your kids."

It wasn't even his job. He exhaled and yet, for the sake of an old friend...

February - 1984

"You have some nerve coming back here telling me you're taking Will to a see a psychiatrist in Indianapolis. What would you even know about *my* son?" she glowered.

"I know something ain't right with the boy after what happened. First they found his body in the quarry only for it not to be him? Come on, babe, how stupid do you think I am? You ain't telling me the whole story, that's fine, but don't tell me the boy came out of that okay. So he's coming with me."

"He is not," she countered fiercely. "If you lay a hand on him I'll –"

Lonnie's lips curled into a malicious sneer. "You'll what? Call the cops? Hopper's still Chief, eh?"

Maybe she would do just that, she thought.

Hopper had been waiting for a chance to knock Lonnie out cold since they were teenagers, and Hopper would definitely know that Will would be better off with her. He would take steps to ensure her son remain in Hawkins.

"He's my kid too, Joyce."

"Suddenly he's your kid?" She laughed. "Oh no, Lonnie, I know what you're up to. The only reason you want to bring him back to Indianapolis to get checked is so you can milk it out. I don't know *how* you're going to do that but I know you, you sleazy piece of

garbage."

"Everything alright here?"

Joyce could cheer but she didn't. Still, she was immensely glad to see Hopper driving up the school driveway. His car was on idle, the windows had been rolled down and a hand was hanging out of the window as he leaned forward.

"If it isn't big old Jim Hopper coming in to save the day," Lonnie sniggered. "Ran out of drunks to throw in the tank, Jimmy? What the hell are you doing at a middle school? Harrassing children part of your new hobby now?"

"Could say the same about you," Hopper grinned mockingly. "Harrassing a woman something you're into? When someone tells me that Lonnie Byers is in town, I find that it's my civic duty to make sure you're not causing trouble. Looks like I'm right about that."

That remarked must have hit a nerve because Lonnie looked like the time for disdainful exchange was over.

"Fuck off, Hopper. We're having a private conversation here and it's none of your business."

Behind Lonnie, Joyce was shaking her head silently. She saw the way Hopper's gaze shifted from Lonnie to her and back to him again.

"Indianapolis finally realised what kind of jerk you are and kicked you out?"

"Surprised Hawkins still didn't realise that about you, Hopper. Fuck off, yeah? Not saying it again."

The bell from the school rang out.

"You can do better than that," Hopper scoffed but by then he had already alighted from his truck, planting himself right in front of Joyce and shielding her.

The school door burst open and throngs of students filed out. Out of the corner of her eyes, Joyce spotted Will coming out of his school

followed by Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Max. The rare sight of the three adults standing by the street halted them in their steps. Amongst his friends, Will recovered first. He hurried over and stood next to Joyce, behind Hopper.

Lonnie narrowed his eyes at Will clearly taking sides.

"We're going," Joyce declared, ushering her son back to her car.

She saw Lonnie trying to follow, heard his voice rang sharp calling for her name but when she glanced over her shoulder, she saw Hopper had his hand on Lonnie's chest, stopping him from taking a step further to follow them.

She made a mental note to thank Hopper the next time they see each other during Dr. Owen's appointment at Hawkins Lab.

December – 1984

Somewhere between Hoppers third eggnog and fifth, and watching the boys giggling as they tried to put up mistletoe, Lonnie Byers had barged into the house.

He swayed on his feet, watching wild-eyed in confusion at the six children and three teenagers gathered there. Hopper rose on his feet, his first instinct was to protect El. He stood next to his girl, hand on her shoulder.

"You having a party?" He turned, waving an accusing finger at Joyce. "When was the last time we had a Christmas party, babe?"

"Get out of my house," Joyce demanded.

It was beautiful, the thought came unbidden to Hopper's mind, to see Joyce stand up to Lonnie. It was beautiful to see the way her eyes flared in anger, to see her stand tall. She had gone to the ends of the earth and battled monsters to get to her son.

This man, standing confused at the sudden authoritative attitude, was no match for her. He knew it. Jonathan knew it. Everybody else in the room could sense it but not Lonnie.

"Look," Lonnie slurred, "just came to ask if I could get a grand. I'll get it back soon as I hit a jackpot."

"Screw you, Lonnie," Joyce said before she landed a punch on her ex-husband's face.

Hopper heard the sickening crunch. He had been in enough fist fight growing up to know a broken nose when he heard one. Seeing Joyce knock Lonnie out was one of the best things Chief Jim Hopper had ever witnessed.

He wasn't even going to book her in for assault.

As Jonathan stared and Will tried to make sense of what just happened, Hopper laughed.

Lonnie Byers deserved it for barging in during Christmas dinner as if he was still living in that house.

10. Pop

Requested by anon: El wants to start calling hopper dad but isn't sure how to bring it up.

Pop

El flipped through the book, pausing once in a while as she read the words on it. Sometimes, she would say the words out loud, enunciating it carefully. At the top steps of the porch, Will stomped on his boots before he took a seat next to her.

They had a kinship, much to Joyce's and Hopper's relief, a bond formed by the familiarity of their time beyond the Gate. They had fallen into a routine. When Will had a nightmare, Hopper would know to send El over to the Byers the next day and they could both be seen talking quietly to each other.

"Will, do you have a papa?"

He paused, the ice cream dripping down his hand. He blinked, licked it clean off his hands before turning towards El.

"Yeah," he answered. "My dad lives in the city – Indianapolis. He's not around much. He comes over sometimes, once or twice a year."

The young girl nodded, as if that explained everything. The frown deepened as she thought of another question.

"When you do see him... You still call him 'dad', yes?"

Will studied her carefully.

"Yep, what's wrong?"

"Mike has a dad..." El bit her lower lip, thinking. "Lucas' got one. Steve has one too, but he doesn't like his dad. I've never seen Dustin's or yours."

"Dustin doesn't talk about his dad," Will shrugged a shoulder. "But

hey, you have one, too!"

"Yes... Papa..."

"No, not him. Hopper!" Will's voice raised an octave in excitement. "Hopper's your dad. Mom told me that he took you in, made it official and signed papers. I'm not supposed to talk about it to anyone *yet* until it's safe. But this means he's your dad. He takes care of you, gives you food and sent you to Snow Ball – just like my mom did!"

"Yes," El nodded slowly, processing his words. "So I can call him that?"

"I think you should – I think he'll like that?"

Her eyes lighted up, "Really?"

"Yeah, really," Will smiled. "And my mom's like your mom anyway. She loves you like she loves me."

At that, a smile bloomed on El's face, like she was proud of that fact.

"I – I love her too. Can I have two of them - a mama and a mom?"

"Jonathan says that if my dad marries his girlfriend, Cynthia, she'll be my step-mom," he explained. "I don't really like her, she's not very nice when I was at my dad's place. But your mama and my mom, they're both nice to you *and* you like them which mean you're the lucky one."

It made El grin. She never thought she would ever be lucky but her life now was turning around for the better ever since she escaped from the lab.

"If I ask Hopper to marry *your* mom, she'll be like my mom *mom....* Yes?"

"Um, I guess so."

"And my dad will be like your dad *dad*."

Will blinked, cocking his head to the side and shrugged. "I think

that'll be cool. Imagine telling everyone the Chief is your dad... Nobody will call me zombie boy."

El shook her head violently at that. "When I get to start school, I won't let them call you that."

Will laughed easily and loudly which made Joyce poke her head out of the door. She smiled at the sight of them.

"Will! Is that ice cream? *Before* dinner?"

He grinned, looking at his mother sheepishly.

"Come on, come inside," Joyce ushered them in. "It will get dark soon."

In the middle of the game on Will's Atari, Jonathan joined in, flopping on the worn out sofa. He grabbed his camera, snapping photos of the two of them for his keepsake for when he leave for college.

The familiar sound of Hopper's truck pulling on the driveway diverted El's attention away from the game. She looked up just as Hopper stepped in. This too was becoming routine – Hopper dropping her off at the Byers whenever Joyce was off from work so El would not be alone at home and then picking her up after his shift, sometimes staying over for dinner.

"Hey, kid," Hopper ruffled her hair as he passed them to get to the kitchen where Joyce was poorly attempting to fix dinner. "Boys," he greeted, popping open a beer can.

"Hello, dad," El replied, her eyes focused on the game.

Hopper sputtered, choking on his beer. Joyce moved immediately, rubbing his back gently.

"Easy there, Hop," she spoke softly. "Is this the first time that she calls you by that?"

"Yeah ... Yeah, I – "

"That's nice," Joyce smiled. "It's sweet. Oh, here she comes."

El wandered into the kitchen and stopped, assessing the situation in front of her. She took in the sight of Hopper a little red in the face and Joyce beaming down at her.

El stepped forward, peering at him from under her curly bangs. "Are you okay?"

"Yep," Hopper nodded, smacking his lips together. "Bit of a shock. Dad?"

"I talked to Will and I've decided that I'm going to call you dad because you are. Right?"

They had this talk before when he sat her down and told her that she would be staying with him permanently, and that he would look after her. He had used the word 'guardian', just so it wouldn't spook her seeing as how she didn't really relate 'papa' with something positive.

Joyce and Hopper glanced at each other, both wondering if the conversation their respective child had was something they wanted to know more about.

El's inquisitive stare bore into them as she patiently waited for an affirmation.

"Alright, yeah, sure," Hopper nodded, swallowing the lump in his throat. He hadn't heard that word, hadn't been called as such for years now. It was making him feel things... It was making him giddy and he realised that he was choking up. He pressed a thumb on the corner of his eyes. "I mean – yeah – it's... it's... Dad... Yeah, we can – we can do that."

"Okay," El nodded, moving to the dining table to see what was for dinner, completely oblivious to the emotional upheaval she had just put Hopper through.

Hopper stood there, acutely aware of Joyce resting a comforting hand on his arm.

"Hey, El, come here," he beckoned. El stepped into his embrace

without hesitation and he dropped a kiss to her head. "I like the sound of that, kiddo."

Tilting her head up to him, El smiled.

"Mrs Byers takes care of me when you're working... like a mom."

"Alright," Hopper clapped her shoulder abruptly. "Let's not jump the gun."

Hopper threw Joyce an apologetic look as he led El out but Joyce.... She was looking at the pair with obvious fondness in her eyes.

I figured with El, she wouldn't beat around the bush. She will just do it/ say it. Like that's it he's my dad i'm calling him that, no discussion.

11. Comforting Joyce

Requested by anon: El sees that Joyce is sad (because of Bob's death) and she tells that she loves her and Hop does too and that she's not alone.

Comforting Joyce

Sometimes, she caught Joyce staring off in the distance while in the midst of doing making for her hot chocolate or cleaning the table. Other times, El heard her let out of a small sigh whenever she glanced at the empty chair on the kitchen table or at the red mug on the counter that nobody seemed to use.

Most of the time though, El noticed the sadness in Joyce's eyes and the way she seemed a little lost and lonely. She knew what it is like to be lonely and alone. When Papa kept her in that small room in the lab for hours and days and again, when Hopper kept her in the cabin with all those rules, she had no one to talk to whenever he left for work but now....

Now she was allowed visits at the cabin from her friends including Max whom she had come to like. Now she was allowed to have sleepovers at the Byers when Hopper had to work nights.

She was not so lonely anymore but still, she hadn't forgotten what it was like to feel desolate and she didn't want the same for Joyce.

She liked Joyce. She always had nice things to say to her, she always had something to feed her and she gave her warm hugs. But, El liked it better when Joyce smiles because it soften her features and it made her look pretty, and Hopper seemed to smile a lot more when Joyce is smiling, which was also something that El liked.

El liked to see Hopper relaxed and enjoying himself, and that happened often when he was with Will's mother.

"Why are you sad?" El asked one evening as she stood next to Joyce, drying dishes that the older woman had washed.

"I'm – I'm not, sweetheart."

That smile was forced. It didn't make Joyce's eyes sparkled as it did when Hopper told that stupid joke yesterday.

"Friends don't lie."

"Well, I'm not your friend."

El winced. That hurt. She thought Joyce was her friend but ... maybe she was wrong. Maybe adults are not supposed to be your friend.

"I'm your...." Joyce paused, thinking of the right word to use. "I'm – "

"Like my mama?" El ventured a guess. All the adult female she had met seemed to be in that capacity. Mrs Wheeler is Mike's mum and Joyce is Will's mum. "Or – Or like my Aunt Becky?"

"Well... " Joyce put away the last plate in the cupboard. "It doesn't matter. Just know that you are my girl, *mine*. That you can come to me with anything, *anything* at all. Okay?"

El smiled when Joyce patted her cheek and brushed back the curls falling in her eyes.

"It means you love me, like you love Will and Jonathan."

"Yes," Joyce kissed her forehead. "I do, sweetheart."

"I love you, too," El replied, looking at her with such intensity. "Hopper, too. We both love you."

It occurred to her then that she might have said something wrong because Joyce looked the way Mike did when he tried the sour candy Dustin gave him two weeks ago. Her face scrunched, in confusion and surprise.

"Hopper?"

"Yes," El nodded and felt the need to reiterate herself with a, "Hopper and me. We love you like you love us."

There was a pause, a heartbeat where nobody said anything.

"So please don't be sad," El said, reaching out to touch her hand. "We're always here. You're not alone. When Jonathan and Will are at school and being alone makes you sad, you can always watch television with me at the cabin. You know the secret knock."

Joyce laughed and El thought it was a nice sound to hear.

"I need to have a word with Hopper about what you're watching. It will rot your brain."

"It wouldn't," she countered smugly. "I get to learn new words."

With that, El offered another smile. She was about to leave the kitchen to join the others when she felt Joyce's hand on her shoulder.

"Jane," Joyce's voice was gentle and soft. "I'm glad you're here. And Hopper too, of course. I'm happy that you're both around a lot more nowadays."

"Saw you and the kid talking," Hopper commented when Joyce finally joined him outside on the porch for a smoke. "Anything interesting?"

Taking a long drag from the cigarette they were sharing, Joyce said with a smile, "She's a good kid, Hop. You're lucky to have her."

"Yeah, I am," Hopper chuckled. "Hey, you have her too on pizza and movie nights, and nights when I have long shifts. Guess we're both lucky."

12. The Birth of Will Byers

Requested by anon: Joyce is in labor with Will and Hop is with her.

Birth of Will Byers

Mrs Hopper had always been nothing but nice and sweet to Joyce. From when she was 13 years old and friends with her son, to when she went through a punk phase during high school and Mrs Hopper caught the both of them buying cigarettes from someone older and even more so when Joyce was too embarrassed to face her following the shameful rumours of Lonnie cheating on her *again*.

Mrs Hopper was always polite and gentle, always inquiring after her health and her baby boy, Jonathan, and she was always asking about her second pregnancy each time they crossed paths at the store.

So in the cold frigid February weather in '71, when news of Mrs Hopper's death reached the outskirts of the town where the Byers were living, Joyce was shocked and upset. She thought of the friendly face she would never see again. She thought of the caring woman who had been eager to see the baby once he was born. And most of all, she thought of Jim Hopper out there somewhere.

He had not been back in Hawkins since he returned from his tour in Vietnam. That was in beginning on '70. He left again in a month to New York City where Joyce learnt from Mrs Hopper that had had been accepted to the Police Academy.

She wondered how he was taking the news. She wondered what he was doing when he learnt about his mother. She wondered if he had anyone or if he was alone, or if he had done was he always did when he was upset – smoke his way through his pack.

It was raining when Joyce drove to the funeral, little Jonathan holding on tightly to her hand. Seeing new faces and being in a new place had always made him recoil back into his shell, barely meeting anyone's eyes when they stopped to say hello to him. Joyce sometimes feared that he would never learn his proper name when

people kept referring to him as *'Lonnie's boy'*.

She easily spotted the solitary figure standing a little away from the crowd.

Her heart ached. She did consider that her presence might be the last thing he wanted. His best buddy, Benny Hammond, was there and yet, there he was, keeping away.

"Hey, Hop," she greeted regardless.

He blinked, surprised to find her there. He took in the sight of her, heavily pregnant, with a small child in tow.

"Hey, Joyce," he nodded.

They said little else. Joyce remained next to him, a steadfast presence, as his sorrows engulfed him. She watched him mumbled quietly under his breath as people approached him to offer condolences. It was only when everyone had left the cemetery, leaving only them there that Hopper's shoulder sagged under the weight of his grief.

The sadness was palpable in his eyes, and Joyce thought little as she wrapped him in her arms. He stiffened at the unexpected embrace but gave in to it. Joyce staggered a little under his weight as he folded his arms around her small frame, clutching on to her.

"I'm sorry about your mother, Hop," she whispered, running her fingers through his hairs. "I loved her just as much as you and I'm – I'm sorry."

They stood there at the cemetery; she a tiny little thing with her eight month old pregnant stomach between them, holding on to this large man nearly a foot taller than her as he pressed his forehead on her shoulder, struggling to keep his emotion in check.

For nearly three weeks after the funeral, Joyce spotted Hopper around town from time to time. He was always keeping to himself, grunting a word or two when someone addressed him – so very different from the teenager she knew. She heard from the town grapevine that he was in the process of settling his mother's affairs

before leaving – monies in the bank, the house.

It was during one of his errands that he found her by the roadside with the hazard lights on. He slowed down his car and stopped, walking over to hers. Joyce startled when she heard the knocking on the window. When she saw him, she forced a tight smile on her face and with shaky hands, unrolled the window.

"You okay?"

"I – uh – I will be," she let out a pained breath.

The way his brows furrowed and the way he peered into the car to find Jonathan sitting at the back seat, clutching on to an unwrapped piece of lollipop as if she had given it to him earlier so it would take the boy's mind off what she was going through told her that Hopper didn't believe a word she said.

"You don't look okay, Joyce," he said, sounding a little worried. "Tell me what's going on. I'll see if it's something I can help you with."

Joyce let out a small helpless chuckle. "I'm... I'm having contractions. It's... It'll pass. I'm sure. Braxton Hicks, I think."

She should have known that he heard only 'contractions'.

"What?" he sputtered, his eyes widening in alarm. "Shit. You – shit."

He reached over the rolled down window, popped the lock from the inside and pulled her car door open.

"I don't want to risk moving you from here to my car so ... can you scoot over? Just ... slowly, alright?"

"Wha – No. I'll – I'll be fine. I just - " She scrunched and winced in pain when another wave hit her. "On second thought, I think – "

"Yeah, you think right. Hospital."

Slowly and with his help, she moved over to the passenger side. Hopper got in and glanced behind at Jonathan, "put your seat belt back on, kid."

Jonathan did as he was told and Hopper took off, speeding through traffic until they reached the hospital.

He watched as the nurses took her away, glancing once at the boy next to him. They were quite the sight, both equally confused and lost, and scared.

When he came into her room not long later, Joyce was in her hospital gown, watching the nurse as she timed her contractions.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" he asked softly, coming to a stand next to her bed.

"I just want it to be over."

"It will be soon."

He offered her an assuring smile then and Joyce was reminded of the time when they were sixteen, and Hopper had given her the same smile when she told him that she was worried about her father. Somehow, without really knowing how or why, she had felt a little better then and now, once again.

"Anyway, I – uh- I came in to tell you that I – I tried to call Lonnie," he rubbed the back of his neck suddenly, a sign that he was uncomfortable. A muscle of his jaw ticked when he caught her eyes. She could tell then that he really did not want to be standing there telling her whatever news he had on Lonnie. "I can't get hold of him at your house. So I called the bar. Y'know, on the offer chance that he might be there and uh... Shit, Joyce," he cursed, letting out a breath.

"It's okay," she tried to assure him. Hopper couldn't probably tell her anything worse than what she had heard before. She took in a breath and let it out – *in and out, in and out* – just like the midwife had taught her. "What is it? He's not coming, is he?"

"Old man Giles at the bar said he saw Lonnie took off this afternoon with a woman..."

Joyce nodded and the complete lack of surprise on her face made him frown.

"He does this often?" he asked, getting angry on her behalf. "That scumbag ... I'm going to – "

"Can we not do this now? *Please*," she pleaded in short breaths. "I'm in fucking pain here."

They could never get along, Lonnie and Hopper, since middle school. At first Joyce thought their rivalry was stupid and then she simply accepted it as something she should get used to.

The pain grew intense just then and she whimpered. He came forward immediately, brushing the matted hair away from her forehead.

"Hop," she groaned. "Please, don't leave me. Not this time."

If she was lucid, she would have seen the way he flinched. She would have realised that her words had made him think of the time two weeks after they graduated when he took off, leaving her and Hawkins behind.

"Hopper," she blindly reached out for his hand and sighed when she felt him clasped it between his own. "Please. Don't go. I can't do this on my own."

He wasn't family and he certainly wasn't her husband, but he had glared at the nurse and told her that he was the only one Joyce had at the moment and the woman had allowed him to stay.

"I'm here. I got you, Joyce," he kissed her forehead. "I'm not going anywhere."

He stayed and he held her hand as she screamed and cursed Lonnie, and moaned and panted, and he was there when the baby cried for the first time. He stood next to her bed, looking down at an exhausted Joyce enraptured by her new born son and if she had glanced up then, she would have seen the odd, pained look on his face.

Perhaps it was better that she hadn't because she would have asked if he was okay, and he wouldn't have been able to say anything with his heart lodged in his throat. He wouldn't have been able to tell her that

she deserved better than Lonnie or that he had spent the entire time next to her in labour thinking of the things he missed out or that when he looked at the baby in her arms, it had occurred to him that if the circumstances were different, she could have been his and that baby could have been theirs.

"William," she whispered. "Hey Hopper, meet Will."

Lonnie came five hours after Will was born, after finally hearing the news. He was sporting a black eye. She heard it was Hopper who gave it to him.

She would have thanked him but he never came to see her again, and by the time she was discharged, he had already gone back to New York.

Leave me some reviews!

13. Talk of The Town

Requested by anon: Can you write a Jopper fic where Flo starts calling the Byers' house when she can't get a hold of Hopper on his radio/home phone and Joyce/Hopper/both kinda freak out all 'why would she assume he's there?'

Talk of the town

The sharp ringing of the phone pierced through the house but with the current commotion going on in the kitchen, Hopper ignored it. Just like how he was ignoring the fact that two years ago, Joyce had shown him her blackened phone, claiming that her son was breathing through it.

They had gotten through hell together to get from that to where they are now.... In Joyce's kitchen, trying to have a decent breakfast....

"Mom," Jonathan glanced over his shoulder from where he was standing at the stove, "the phone."

Next to him, El stood with her tongue between her teeth as she tried to concentrate on flipping the bacon with the wooden ladle Jonathan had given her to use. From where he was sitting, a hand propped on the kitchen table and the other holding on to the cup of coffee, Hopper watched her.

The slices of bacon kept sliding off and he would have suggested a pair of tongs but he decided that she should figure it out herself. Except it was El so with a growl of frustration, she slammed the ladle on the kitchen counter and took a step back with her hand outstretched. Four slices of bacon hovered in mid-air.

"Hey, what did I tell you?" he frowned. "You can't take short cuts, kid."

Behind him, he could hear Joyce's amused chuckles.

"It won't work," the young girl glared at Hopper. "This... easier."

"You just need practice," Jonathan encouraged. "Mom, seriously, the phone's ringing again. Can you pick it up, please?"

She sighed. Hopper thought he knew the reason she was hesitant about answering her phone. Lonnie had called two days ago asking after Will and she was not comfortable letting Lonnie come over to take Will out for a game.

He caught her worried gaze over Will's head and gave her a smile, one he hoped was reassuring. She did that little head tilt to the side as she returned his smile and it was a gesture that Hopper realised he was quite fond of.

It was odd how things turned out for them. From when they were kids in middle school, to those moments in high school and now, the adults that they had become. There was so much history and pain but there were also moments like this when they exchanged a quiet smile in a noisy kitchen that made him feel... well, not *happy* but content at least.

It might have been selfish of him but he wouldn't change anything that had happened over them. He wouldn't, he thought, even as he glanced guiltily over at Will. He squeezed the boy's shoulder and was given a quizzical look for his effort.

Over the course of the few months after El had closed the gate, the Hoppers and the Byers had fallen into a comfortable routine. It started with him sending El over to sleep nights at Joyce's place when he had to work the shift only for both of them to realise that Will and El had gotten closer, that their time in the Upside Down had forged a bond that they didn't share with the others. Joyce had asked Hopper to bring El more often in the hopes of having Will open up to someone at the very least, and their Sunday morning breakfast at the Byers was born.

Jonathan began guiding El with the breakfast preparation when she showed interest and shadowed him as he prepared eggs and toasts and pancakes. Frankly, Hopper thought it was a mistake. He had come home often enough to see that El had made toasts and omelette for *dinner*. Frozen pizza and microwaveable food was not something she enjoyed anymore, not since she started having proper cooked

meal at the Byers whenever she was over. They had spoilt her.

"I'll answer," the youngest Byers offered, pushing his chair back.

Hopper had a sudden irrational thought that shoulder squeeze might have spooked the boy out and he was trying to get away. Why this mattered to him was something he couldn't explain.

"It's okay, baby, I'll get it."

There was a frown on El's face when she turned towards Hopper. He took a long pull from his cigarette, steeling himself for whatever question she would inevitably ask him. He didn't mind it that much, the fact that she always had questions. It felt nice that she could turn to him for answers.

"Why is Joyce always calling Will a baby? He is not."

Will flushed but otherwise, he stayed out of the conversation.

"It's a nickname, like when I call you sweetheart. Your heart ain't actually sweet, is it?"

"Hop," Joyce walked back into the kitchen, looking slightly unsettled. He stood up immediately, already preparing himself to give Lonnie a piece of his mind over the phone. "It's actually for you."

"Me?"

He raised an eyebrow. Lonnie was looking for him?

"It's Flo," Joyce explained which only made his confusion even more pronounced. "She said something about you being needed at the station."

"Okay... Why would Flo be calling *your* house looking for *me*?"

"That was what I asked her," Joyce replied, biting lightly on her lower lip. "She couldn't get you at yours."

"So she called here?"

"It makes sense," Will piped in. "You're always here."

That quiet declaration stunned the house silent. Joyce stared at her son, opening her mouth slightly as if she wanted to say something but couldn't find the words. Hopper was suddenly aware of both Jonathan and El watching them.

"That's – That's okay right, buddy?" Hopper asked.

"Yeah," Will nodded, "that's okay."

"Hop... Flo on the phone..." Joyce reminded him.

He walked down the hallway towards where the phone was and pressed the receiver to his ear, "Yeah?"

"Have you finally moved in with the Byers?"

That, Hopper decided was not something he should address *at all* because with Flo, that one question could lead to three more and most importantly, it would open a can of worms he was not ready to talk about with Joyce. He liked Flo because sometimes he reminded him of his late mother and her heart was always in the right place but that woman could be nosy.

"Morning is for coffee and contemplation, Flo," he hissed. "Can't a man have his breakfast in peace?"

"Yes, of course... I think they are good for you, Chief, the Byers... Look at you, having breakfast..." she chuckled. "You never had breakfast before you found that Byers boy. I'm thankful that Joyce is feeding you because donuts at the station doesn't count, makes my job easier trying to keep you healthy. I might have to thank her should I see her at the store."

Hopper pinched the bridge of his nose.

It wasn't true. He had breakfast plenty of time with El ever since he brought her in but Flo, like everyone else in Hawkins, had no knowledge about El and he would prefer to keep it that way, at least until Sam Owen declare it safe.

"You will do no such thing or I'll have you fired. Don't talk to Joyce... about this."

He had used that threat one too many times that Flo knew he would never see it through. She laughed quietly as she hung up the phone. Still, it made him wonder as he joined the others back in the kitchen if the rest of the town was talking about him and Joyce.

He decided that he didn't care but Joyce... She might care.

She might care that they were associating her with him especially when Bob's death was still so fresh in her mind.

14. Questions and Answers

Prompt: Joyce is looking after El one day and she asks about Hopper and what kind of relationship do they have because it's not clear to El (and probably not to them either). Later when Hopper comes up to pick up El she asks again and they have to confront their feelings and maybe just maybe bring up what happened on chapter 7. Idk I thought it would be nice for them at least acknowledge the feelings. No need for them to actually get together or anything just so they know it's there

Questions and Answers

Joyce had declared bedtime an hour ago and had *finally* settled down on the sofa with a glass of wine that Karen had given her from a month ago. With her head thrown back and her eyes closed, she let out a sigh of relief.

She loved having Jane over. She really do but Will had taken her to Castle Byers earlier where they had been holed up for hours and even though Joyce knew where they were at all times she still couldn't feel that jolt of anxiety every now and again that something might happen.

Not when Will's parting words to her before they left the house was, "I'm showing El the palace. She wants to see the place she found me when you asked her to look for me in the school gym. Well, she's seen it but it was in the Upside Down. It's different now... *here*."

They tended to do that, sit together someplace just the both of them, *talking*. Sometimes she wondered what they talked about. Other times, Will or Jane would open up and share it with her.

Her eyes fluttered open when she heard the soft padded footsteps. Turning her head to the right, she saw Jane coming out of guest room – a room Joyce had by now thought of as *hers* – and walking towards her.

"Is everything okay, sweetheart?"

"Yes," she nodded, taking a seat next to Joyce with her legs folded underneath her. "I'm not sleepy."

"Just close your eyes and start counting, you will fall asleep."

She felt the weight of the girl pressing against her side so just like she would have done with her sons, Joyce stretched her arm around Jane's small frame. The girl looked up at her with a smile and scooted closer, resting her head on Joyce's shoulder.

The television in front of them was playing some late night soap opera which Jane was clearly fond of. For a while, they both watched it quietly.

"Are you and ... dad," she said the word with such care, still trying to familiarise herself with using the word to describe who Hopper is to her, "friends?"

Joyce blinked, her eyes still focused on the television before she fully processed Jane's question.

"Of course, we are."

Jane tugged on the loose thread of the pajama, finding something to distract herself.

"Is he your *only* friend?"

"I wouldn't say that... I'm friends with Karen. Mike's mom..."

"That doesn't count," the girl declared. "She's a lady, like you. Dad's like your *boyfriend*."

The last thing Joyce expected that night was to hear Hopper being labelled as such in relation to her. She sputtered.

Jane pulled away, watching her with a slight crease on her brows. She reached over and patted Joyce's back, the way she had seen Joyce do to Will or Jonathan or Hopper when they coughed.

"Hopper... No," Joyce shook her head. "Not in that sense. I mean... Yeah, he is my friend who happens to be a man but – but he is not

the only male friend I have."

"Really?"

She sounded highly sceptical that Joyce felt the need to somewhat prove herself. "There's Ted Wheeler, Mike's dad."

Tilting her head contemplatively to the side, Jane said, "I've never seen Mike's dad at this house. Not like us. You don't make coffee or give him beer and you don't go to the porch with Mike's dad to smoke. You do that with *my* dad. Mike's dad doesn't even come when you can't sleep. He doesn't help you fix you leaking pipe. My dad did when you toilet is full of water. Oh! Mike's dad doesn't play games with you or Will or me. Why are you friends with Mr Wheeler but different than with my dad?"

That, Joyce decided, was a solid observation and a good point. It never ceased to amaze her the way the mind of children and teenagers work. They tended to view the world from a different perspective. One that, at times, could be alarming; like this one, for instance.

"It's never the same between two people, Jane. I – I think there are never two friendships that is the same. The way it is with you and... with you and Lucas, or you with Dustin, or you with Max. You are friends with them but not the way you are friends with Will. You share something with Will that you don't talk about with Dustin or Lucas because they don't understand, not really. Or, your friendship with Mike..."

"Mike is a special friend."

"Yes, he is to you."

Her frown deepened. "Is my dad your special friend?"

She really should have seen that coming. The entire conversation was leading to that and yet, Joyce still stared at her, her mind running a mile a minute.

"I supposed," she nodded slowly.

Her gaze landed on the walkie-talkie on the coffee table, one with a pair that Hopper possessed. It had been Will's and Jane's idea to gift them with walkie-talkies back during Christmas of '84. It would solve the problem of Joyce calling the house or the station trying to reach Hopper and save Flo the trouble of having to answer multiple calls from Joyce Byers looking for Jim Hopper. The only reason Hopper was amenable to the idea was so he could check in on Jane when he had to work nights.

"I supposed he is," Joyce went on, reaching out to lightly touch the walkie-talkie, not realising that Jane was watching.

He had talked her through it one night when she had woken in cold sweat, the scene of Bob's death replaying over and over again each time she closed her eyes. He had listened, wherever he was at that time, as she recounted the nightmare. He had been her rock, all these time, through everything – her mother's death, her father's, holding Lonnie back to stop him from attacking her when he found out she had served the divorce paper on his mistress doorstep since he wouldn't come home for days, her son's disappearance, Will's possession, Bob's death.

He had been there through the good ones too. Moments like her birthdays, graduating middle school and going into high school together, concerts of their favourite bands... She smiled fondly at the memory of them working extra shifts at the Hammond's diner just so they could buy concert tickets.

"So he is your boyfriend."

"He's not. I don't know where you get all these ideas but – It's complicated, sweetheart. It's not something that is easy to explain."

"Why? What's difficult?"

"Why are you asking me all these questions about Hopper, Jane?"

She huffed looking a little angry now.

"Dustin asked me. He asked if you and Chief are together. I said yes because we are always here and you are always together with him."

But Mike said that isn't what Dustin meant. He wanted to know if you're boyfriend and girlfriend, like Lucas and Max, and if my dad is going to be Will's dad and if you're going to be my mom – like Max's family. Then Lucas said you and dad have to get married first but before that you have to be *together*. I didn't know what they were all saying, sometimes they talk too fast. I get confused. I thought I'd ask you. You'll always help me."

She was glad it was beyond midnight and the overhead lamp in the living room was quite dim because she was sure she was flushed with embarrassment at the thought of her and Hopper being the topic of conversation for these teenagers.

"That boy, Dustin, is far too curious for his own good."

Jane laughed then and Joyce managed to convince her to try and get some sleep. She should have known that Jane was persistent and since she couldn't get an answer out of her, she tried Hopper the very next day when he came to pick her up.

"But why?" she insisted when Hopper evaded answering the question. "She said the same thing! Why is it complicated? I like Mike and Mike likes me. Mike makes me... He makes me happy."

"Yeah?" Hopper glanced at her at the passenger seat. "That's good."

"He's my special friend."

"Yeah, don't get *too* special, though."

"So?" she frowned, ignoring that comment and choosing to circle back to the crux of the matter.

"It just is, okay? Adults are – There are just things between us that doesn't make it easy. Look, if it's up to me, I wish it was as simple as you and the Wheeler boy. It was simpler when we were kids, back when we were just a little older than you."

"How simple?"

"Simple like.... There are no baggage and personal issues to deal with. We were just ... free. We were just us."

"Baggage? What's that mean? Just us?"

Hopper sighed loudly, resigning himself to the barrage of questions.

I realise only after I'm done that I didn't address them confronting their feelings, oops!

15. Moments

Requested by anon: Joyce catch Hop starring at her

Moments

There were countless moments that she had caught him staring at her, always when he thought that she wasn't looking or when he thought that she wasn't paying him any attention because she was too focused with Will.

Except it was Hopper and he filled the room so it was difficult to ignore his presence. She couldn't even if she wanted to. Not that she wanted to, honestly, because him being around was calming to her.

Right after she lost Bob, she *hated* his lingering looks. It made her feel as if he was walking on eggshells with her. The way his eyes sometimes search her face when she forced a smile for the sake of the children or the way his gaze fell on her whenever she entered or leave a room as if he wanted to make sure that she would be okay...

Joyce had gone through hell and back, and yet the way he quietly looked out for her, as if the death of her lover might be the final straw to break her was what made her really wanted to curl and cry.

She didn't, of course. She mourned quietly and she didn't really object when Hopper sat quietly next to her, giving her nothing but his strong, silent presence.

He was just concerned and she shouldn't begrudge him for it. She wished she could tell him that she was grateful that he stuck with her through it all but the words were often lodged in her throat.

Months after Bob's death, even when the pain of his loss had dulled, Joyce began to notice that Hopper's gaze *always* lingered. It wasn't out of concern that she might break down or have an anxiety attack. He was just... staring.

It was never inappropriately for her to call him out on it. It was as if

he just ... liked looking at her. It unnerved her initially that anyone would still look at her that way at her age now.

Joyce could laugh and snort at something Jonathan said or smile stupidly at something Will did or choked at a question Jane asked and she could still turn to him to see him looking at her with that half smile on his face.

"I'm alright," she told him quietly under her breath when she felt him watching her that cold afternoon, an unspoken question on his lips and the slight worry back in his eyes. "I always knew he would be leaving for New York. It's what he's always wanted."

The night after she returned with Will from New York, having sent Jonathan off that Hopper came to visit with Jane. They were gone for five days and it was obvious from the way Jane tightly hugged her before going off to find Will that she missed them.

Joyce was in the kitchen, spreading peanut butter on bread and Hopper was there too, leaning against the refrigerator, a cigarette between his fingers.

"You're staring at me again," she remarked.

"Yeah," he said, not even bothering to deny it. "How you holding up?"

Joyce let out a sigh at the question.

"I know he will be okay there. I know he will. I just can't help but worry a little," she gave a wry smile over her shoulder at him before focusing back on the sandwich. "Jonathan promise he'll call every Sunday."

He reached forward to give her elbow a reassuring squeeze but before he could take his hand back, she rested a hand on his. When she turned to face him, the look of concern gave way to one of confusion.

Their eyes met.

"You look at me as if nothing I do could – " she paused. "You look at me as if I matter..."

And that was a wonderful feeling especially when the rest of the town tend to dismiss her as Lonnie's widow or worst, someone a little off.

"You do," he muttered, taking a long drag from his cigarette.

"Sometimes you look at me as if you want to kiss me."

Hopper blinked. His eyes flashed for a second before he cleared his throat, looking down at his boots.

"Guess you're right," he said after only a slight hesitation and that admittance surprised her.

Joyce dropped her hand but he caught her wrist.

"Hey," he muttered gruffly, his thumb brushing gently on her inner wrist. "It's just all in my head okay. I'm not expecting anything from you."

"I – I wouldn't mind it, Hop."

She didn't let him time to think or to internalise what she said because otherwise, she would lose her courage. Otherwise, she would lie awake at night battling between the growing desire to give in to what she wanted and to respect Bob.

How long was the appropriate time to mourn? Was there a timeline?

She didn't know. All she knew was that feeling of loneliness and despair, and it was something Hopper knew all too well.

There would never be a right time, she realised. There would always be something – a monster going after her son, Bob's death and Jonathan moving to New York – that would make Hopper hesitant about doing anything out of respect for her. If they waited, they would be waiting forever.

So when she felt his arm slide around her waist to pull her closer, Joyce sighed into his lips, her hand fisting a handful of his shirt.

For the first time in a long time, she didn't feel like she needed to be

strong for anyone. Being held by him and being kissed by him, it felt like the world that had tilted on its axis had righted itself back again.

16. Third Wheeling

Requested by anon: Can you write something where maybe Bob catches Joyce and Hopper in a moment or something? No disrespect to Bob, I love him! :)

Merry Christmas, Jopper fandom! :)

In my house, we ship Jopper but we also respect Bob Newby, Superhero. He is the MVP. So this is Jopper throughout the years through Bob's eyes.

Third Wheeling

He remembered where they were all teenagers at Hawkins High.

He remembered Jim Hopper, leaning against his dad's Oldsmobile with effortless nonchalance, and an arm looped around Chrissy Carpenter's waist. He doubted he would ever forget how he often made sure to keep his head low as he passed by the group of them after school, but someone, usually Benny Hammond in his towering height would spot him.

"Look at Bob the Brain go."

The group of them would laugh especially Chrissy who seemed to find that nickname especially hilarious. Jim would give a half smirk and even though he hardly laughed out loud at his best friend's joke, he had never told Benny off either.

Bob remembered Joyce Horowitz, too. She was always coming in late, always trying to slip to the back of the classroom unnoticed. She was small, tiny but she could also hold her own against a teacher or another student which was often the reason she was in detention.

He wished at times that he could be as brave as her or as indifferent as Jim, then perhaps the others would stop making fun of him, but it was just wishful thinking.

Sometimes, as he walked the back of the school to get to the AV

room, he would spy her with Jim at the bleachers, just two small figures in the distance. Other times, he could smell the cigarette smoke off her after sixth period.

He was aware that Joyce and Jim had been friends from middle school but when they entered high school and Joyce moved out of the neighbourhood to the outskirts of town, their social circle couldn't have been more different.

Still, Bob thought, it was nice that they still have their moments even if that meant breaking the school rule by sneaking away to share a cigarette.

Throughout his school life, Joyce had never acknowledged his existence. He didn't know if she even knew that they shared some classes together. Jim, at least, knew him. Well, knowing him as 'Bob the Brain' was still knowing and aside from the moniker, Jim had never actually given him any trouble. He had never stood up for him as his friends laughed behind his back, not that Bob expected him to, of course.

Once, when Lonnie Byers shoved him against the lockers, Jim had even pulled Lonnie by the back of his collar and punched him in the face.

"Don't be an asshole, Byers," Jim spat.

Frankly, Bob suspected it was not to help him, per se, but more of a chance to have a go at Lonnie. He never understood the longstanding grudge between the pair but he wasn't about to question it, not when Jim had saved him from more potentially embarrassing scenarios Lonnie could inflict on him in the middle of the school hallway.

"Th- thanks," Bob stuttered, picking himself off the floor.

"Yeah," Jim nodded, barely glancing in his direction.

He was staring at Joyce standing in the hallway looking at the scene in front of her, her eyes darting from Lonnie to Jim, and then to Bob gathering his materials for his AV club.

Bob wondered right at that second if she knew who he was but he

doubted that because she turned on her heels and walked away. Jim jerked, a foot moving in front of him and Bob thought for a moment that he was going to go after her but Lonnie beat him to it, brushing past him with a malicious sneer.

Jim and Joyce... They had moments like that scattered throughout high school, and curiously, sometimes Bob wondered what the deal was between them, the push and the pull between the pair was rather fascinating, to say the least.

Bob noticed it again not long after he started dating Joyce in '84. As he drove up the now familiar road leading towards her house, he noticed the Chief of Police's Blazer. Thinking that something was wrong, he sped up.

When his knock went unanswered, Bob left himself in. He walked in into what was clearly an intense, charged moment between Joyce and Jim.

"Is – Is everything alright?"

That broke the staring match. Joyce bit her lip, arms crossed protectively in front of her. Jim turned towards him.

"Maybe you can talk to her," he muttered. "Tell her Chicago's worth a try for Will's sake. You know what happened last year."

He knew. He had read the papers. Will had gone missing, presumed dead and had a funeral held after a body was dredged up and then, miraculously, he was found alive. It was a traumatic experience for Joyce and her family, and he had tried as best as he could to comfort her and see them through it.

"What's in Chicago?" he asked.

Jim pressed a brochure on his chest as he walked past.

"What was that?" Bob turned to Joyce for an answer.

She sighed but took the brochure from him and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

"Don't worry about it. How was work?"

He should feel offended that he was kept on the side line but he spent most of his teenager years that way that he had long accepted it as normal. There was also clearly something Jim knew that he was not privy to since Jim had been on the case from the start. He didn't want to pry either and send Joyce scuttling away so he held his peace. She would tell him in her own time, he decided.

She didn't. She never came around to letting him in all the way. He suspected that she might be trying to put it all behind her and move on with her life, with him in it.

All he got from her were bits and pieces, and conversations he picked up whenever he dropped by and Jim happened to there or phone calls between them.

He kept giving. All the care and love that he had, he gave it to her and he didn't even mind. He just wanted to be there for her and her boys.

So when he came around to the sight of drawing papers plastered all over her house and she told him 'no questions ask', he decipher Will's drawing of Hawkin's without even blinking. If he could help, then why not?

"What's Jim doing here?" he asked as Joyce brought the car to a screeching halt inches from Jim's Blazer in the middle of an empty field.

Then she was asking for his help to get down the hole. It should occur to him then that there was something deeper shared between those two, something neither had ever acknowledged. She was, after all, willing to jump down into something clearly dangerous and unknown just to find him, and he wondered if *she* knew what it meant because *he* knew what it meant the moment he decided to go in after her into the hole. If you love someone, you never let them go at it alone, not even in the face of danger.

Then the nagging feeling that perhaps, Joyce had never realised the feelings she had for Jim or that he, Bob the Brain, was someone she

went to because she couldn't admit her own feelings for the Chief of Police, was pushed from his thoughts the moment he figured out that '*We're actually inside of Will's map*'. He was so focused on that discovery, it completely did not register to him that Joyce was ignoring him as she continuously shouted for Jim.

He followed her and when they found him....

When they released him from the vines.... When they helped him up....

Bob merely stood there and tried hard to look away the moment Joyce cradled Jim's face in her hands, her eyes searching for any injuries. The fear and worry was palpable in her voice as she asked, "Hopper, are you okay? Oh my god, are you okay?"

It was not lost on Bob that the way Jim said her name – '*Joyce*' – had the instantaneous effect of calming her. It was that simple.

Easy peasy, he thought.

He kept his gaze fixed on the vines, watching in case it tried to tangle them all while trying hard to ignore the pair of them next to him. He felt very much like an outsider, like he was intruding on a special moment.

"Hey, Bob," Jim breathed, finally noticing his presence.

"Hey, Jim."

He wondered what it was they shared in high school. He wondered what it was that kept them apart. He wondered what would happen if 'Nam never happened or if Lonnie wasn't there. He wondered what would happen if *he* wasn't here. Would they have done *something*?

It was a train of thought he didn't really want to entertain.

Joyce chose him, Bob the Brain, and that was good enough for him.

17. By The Names

Requested by anon: Hey, I wondered if you'd be interested in writing something about the different names Joyce calls Hopper. As in "Hopper" meant business, "Hop" fit the playful friendship they have come to share, but regardless of any of that, whenever she called him "Jim" he had to suppress the urge to kiss her, and it got harder every time." I only use the sentence to explain, you don't have to use it ofc. Alternative: Joyce calls him "Jim" in a particularly emotional/angsty moment and it makes him lose control

By The Names

Hopper could tell the subtle indication to her mood from what she called him by. He let her call him by whatever name she deemed fit and he slowly realised that it was largely dependent on what she needed from him and how she was feeling which worked in his favour because it gave him a chance to react accordingly.

Throughout the year, he had heard her call him James or Jim, rare though that was. He was also Hopper which at times was shortened to Hop.

When they first met as children in elementary school, he was James because that was how Mrs Snow introduced him to everyone in class.

She called him Jim once at the age of thirteen when all the other boys were rude and rowdy, and he was sweet on her by giving her his place on the bus. Joyce had smiled gently at him and he decided right then that he liked it when she called him Jim. He never told her that he had actually asked his mother to stop calling him by that name since the sixth grade.

It was just that his name sounded different on her tongue. Or perhaps, it was the way her eyes softened when she looked at him. She never looked at any boys that way – it was always blazing and fiery as if she was ready to pick a fight with them. He liked that he had a little spitfire by his side as they went through school together.

In Hawkins High, they had a senior named James. Each time *that* James or his friends heard the name coming from Joyce, they would often go, "what is it, baby?" which made Hopper's blood boil.

"Drop it, Joyce," he muttered angrily as he tugged on her arm to get her away from the group. "Don't call me James anymore. Don't give them a reason to have a go at you."

"I don't care about them," she frowned, all-angry at the unfairness that he had to concede because of them. "It doesn't bother me."

"It bothers *me*, alright?" he snapped.

When Benny Hammond started calling him Hopper, the other followed suit and long after *that* James had graduated, the name stuck. She still gave him shit for not taking a stand, and would only call him Hopper when she was being serious with him.

The first time she called him Hop, he hadn't been expecting it at all.

"Hey, Hop," Joyce greeted with a grin.

"Hop?" he laughed, offering her his lighted up cigarette.

"Yeah, like hop over and make space for me," she answered, nodding at the empty space to his right. "But it works as your name too. You hoard names, you realise that?"

She plopped down next to him once he scooted an inch and they sat there in the cold, sharing a smoke.

"That's your mother's car," he remarked, putting out the cigarette before they could both get in trouble. "See you at the party tomorrow?"

She scrunched her face as if she had just tasted something unpleasant.

"Don't think I'm going for that. I'm moving, remember?"

He did remember. Her father had lost his job four months ago, and the family was moving to the outskirts of town where the mortgage

would be cheaper and easier to keep up with. It would add considerable distance from his place to her new house but he figured he would be getting his dad's Oldsmobile sooner or later that it wouldn't be a problem.

The distance however did eventually become a problem until they found themselves slowly in two completely different social circles.

"Hopper!"

Having recognised her voice, he froze.

"Did something wrong, buddy?" Benny snickered before leaving him to his fate.

"Where were you?" Joyce asked, planting herself right his path.

At sixteen, and after his growth spurt, Hopper towered a head taller than her but that didn't stop her from glaring up at him.

"Uh..."

He was trying to buy time, wishing the bell would go off so he could escape this conversation.

"You were supposed to pick me up yesterday night. I waited for you, Hopper. You didn't show."

"Look, Joyce," he sighed. "I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you."

Truth was, he had totally forgotten. Chrissy Carpenter had invited him to her house and he wasn't about to let that chance pass.

"So you ended up not going?" Hopper asked, walking into school with her.

"I called Lonnie. He drove me."

He frowned. Lonnie's name kept cropping up lately, ever since Joyce moved house. Lonnie Byers lived four houses down from hers but *still* that was no reason for her to hang out with him.

"If the stupid car wasn't in the workshop I could have driven myself," she muttered. "Hey, Lonnie."

Hopper scowled at the sight of the dark haired boy. He left Joyce's side to make his way towards where Benny and Chrissy was waiting for him, and when he glanced in their direction, he saw them walking to class together.

Over the years, whenever she called him 'Hopper', it was with a little less anger and annoyance. Sometimes it was with impatience and desperation as she tried to convince him that she hadn't lost her mind and that she really heard Will through the phone.

He believed her.

When he heard her call him 'Hop', he expected some laughter and teasing to follow like it always did back when they were younger but what he got was a voice heavily laced with exhaustion; of someone who just wanted the whole affair with the Mind Flayer to end; of someone who just wanted her son's pain to end.

"Promise me it will get better, Jim," she said one day in the middle of the night in her kitchen.

It startled him because she seldom addressed him as that. It reminded him of far easier times when they were thirteen... When she would look at him like it was only them in the world.

And then he knew why she called him Jim.

He had been nothing but kind to her tonight. He had sat in her room quietly right after they escaped from Hawkins Lab as she tried to wrap her head around the fact that Bob died so they could all escape.

"Jim..."

He curled his fingers into a fist because that name coming from her.... It sent a thrill straight to him and it was inappropriate considering what just happened.

"We'll end this, Joyce. He won't die for nothing."

"I just – He didn't deserve it, Hop. He didn't deserve that," she choked and there was nothing else to do except to gather her in his arms as she finally let herself cry.

That night, he decided, the name by which she called him was no longer a true indication of the way she was feeling. She was a mess and he didn't blame her for it.

He could be Jim, the boy who was sweet to her, or Hop, the teenager that she often got into all sort of trouble with, or Hopper, the person she could get along with one second and argue the next. No matter what she called him by, he was still the same person to her. He still needed to be the anchor in her life – the person she could turn to, the one who would have her back no matter what and the one to make sure that both she and her son would make it through this.

18. A Different Light

Based on the tumblr dialogue prompt: "We need to talk about last night"

A Different Light

Joyce had never seen Hopper in this light before. At least, she hadn't for a long time. Not since he left Hawkins, essentially leaving her behind after they both graduated.

Since his return, he had always just been Hopper, ex-lover and ex-schoolmate or Hopper, Chief of Police. She had never associated anything romantic with him.

She was not sixteen anymore and the years between had changed them. It had added skeletons, baggage, issues and layers of complexity to their characters.

But yesterday... Something had changed; something that made her consider the possibility of something *more* than what they shared. He had always been there by her side since Will was taken into the Upside Down and he had been supportive all the way. While she had needed him, she didn't think she had ever thought of him this way before...

Until yesterday when he had made her laugh in her kitchen as he offered to help her prepare meatloaf to feed six children.

When he had tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear when it got in her way...

When he had stared into her eyes a second too long and she swore they had a moment...

A moment they acted upon because they had leaned in and her eyes had fluttered closed when she felt his lips moving against hers... Hopper had held her face with both hands in a gesture so gentle it took her breath away.

And she couldn't stop thinking about it. She tried to brush it off but the memory was burnt in her mind. Was she lonely and desperate?

Or was there really something between them that she was only starting to see now? Was she fixated on that *one* kiss with Hopper because the solitude from losing Bob made her crave someone's attention and touch?

"Mom?"

Joyce blinked, pulled out of her own thoughts by her youngest son's voice.

"Morning, baby."

He wrinkled his nose at the moniker but sat down on the empty chair and with a laugh pointed out that she was burning the eggs.

"I'll get them," Jonathan offered when he entered the kitchen to see the slightly burnt breakfast.

Grateful for his help, Joyce kissed Jonathan's cheek. Sometimes she wondered what will happen once he leaves for college. The moment she poured herself a cup of coffee and sat next to Will, he started talking without being asked. She loved to see the sparkle of excitement in his eyes as he told her all about last night's latest Dungeon and Dragons campaign and the way both Max and Jane were starting to enjoy the games the boys had introduced them too.

She loved having her son back and safe.

Once in a while, her gaze would stray to the wall clock. As the hour drew nearer, she felt nauseated from the flutters in her stomach. Her hands felt clammy and no matter what she told herself to calm her own mind, it didn't seem to be working.

She was nervous about meeting Hopper after yesterday and she felt silly. She wasn't sixteen anymore and seeing Hopper after they shared a kiss shouldn't have this much effect on her.

Except it did and the fact that Hopper was late, as usual, in dropping Jane off that Saturday morning was not making things better.

Perhaps he realised the mistake he made and did not want to see her again... Perhaps he was saving them both the embarrassment...

At the sound of the doorbell, Joyce stood up in a rush, drawing startled looks from her sons.

"Hey Hop," she greeted, closing the front door behind her once Jane had entered.

She stepped out into the porch. His Blazer was parked next to her car with his hat thrown on the dashboard. Next to her, Hopper lighted up a cigarette.

"Got anything for me?" he glanced hopefully in her direction.

Laughing, Joyce handed him the sandwiches she had made him for lunch. She didn't know exactly when she started preparing food for his lunch on his Saturday shifts but it had become a habit when he dropped Jane off only to leave with a brown paper bag each time.

"Thanks," he nodded, walking down the porch towards his Blazer.

She had no choice but to follow because there was no way she was going to head back inside without having a proper conversation about this.

"Umm," she wrapped her arms around herself as she watched him tossed the brown paper bag into the passenger seat. "We need to talk about last night."

Hopper paused mid-drag and exhaled, propping his arm on his truck's unwind window. And she wondered how that simple act could be so sexy. Her eyes widened in alarm. Since when did she ever thought of him as *sexy*? He was sexy when he was seventeen and sneaking around to smoke at the bleachers. It made him a badass and definitely attractive but now... She studied him, taking in the slightly wrinkled sleeve cuffed from where he must have missed when he ironed, the paunch in his stomach and the beard that could certainly use a trim... He wasn't sexy the way his seventeen year old self had been but he was... attractive in his own ways now.

Stop it, Joyce, she chided herself. Focus!

"It was ..." he swallowed, unable to meet her eyes. "It was a momentary lapsed in judgment."

"Oh," she blinked, not quite sure where this feeling of disappointment was coming from.

Surely he was right?

She and Hopper.... It was a laughable idea. She couldn't even imagine. And the town would explode with the gossip. Besides, he was her friend. That was all. It would be too complicated. They were both complicated people.

"It is, isn't it?" he glanced her way, as if suddenly unsure.

"Of course," she laughed nervously. "It was ... silly. I'm sorry I don't know what I was thinking yesterday."

"Hey, no, don't be sorry. I - You know, I ... For what it's worth, I enjoyed it, Joyce."

"Yeah, yeah, me too," she forced a smile.

She rubbed her arms, wanting nothing more than to just disappear back into the house.

"I'm glad we cleared this up," she said. "I should get back. See what the kids are up to."

"Yeah," he nodded.

She quirked another smile and turned around but his words stopped her short.

"We're both not in a good place... I mean it's not a good time....You have Jonathan moving off to New York to think about and I've got to make sure El's - "

"You're right," she glanced at him over his shoulder. "Let's not think too much about it. It was just a kiss."

"Just a kiss..." she heard him muttered under his breath and she tried not to give much thought to the despondent note in his voice.

19. Reminiscing The Past

Based on Tumblr dialogue prompt: 4. "I should have told you a long time ago."

Reminiscing The Past

Once in a while, Hopper made it a point to drop by the Byers' house to check on them. He knew that ever since they got Will out of the Upside Down, Joyce had been overly protective of her boy. He didn't blame her. In fact, since he had begun to shelter El, he understood it completely.

It was one of those nights and they were sitting on the porch swing smoking cigarettes and for him, drinking the occasional can of beer. His shift just ended and he had already called the cabin to let El know that he would be coming home soon.

He had never told Joyce before but he looked forward to nights like this. The two weeks he had stayed away after their argument had been difficult but Joyce called him out on it and then he was back here again, like normal.

"Come on," he chuckled. "I was a teenager. You can't hold that over my head."

"You were *eager*," Joyce pointed out, flicking the ashes from her cigarette. "What – What is that word... Finesse? You had none of it."

He snorted on his beer. It was true. The first time he had sex with Joyce in the back of his car, he had gone straight for it.

"I'm surprised you remember it," he commented.

"I remember a lot of things about you, Hop."

Her laughter had tapered off. She took on a faraway look and since they had been reminiscing their younger days together, Hopper figured she had gotten to the sour part of their relationship.

"I'm sorry about how things turned out," she said quietly, surprising him.

Hopper took a drag, taking his time to reply.

"Yeah, me too," he exhaled. "We didn't handle things well."

"What happened?" She turned to look at him, curious and searching for answers. "It's been more than two decades. We can talk about it right?"

The right thing to do would be to let it remain where it was – in the past. But it was plain to see that this was something that had haunted her for years. Something had happened to make him turn his back on her so abruptly when just months before their graduation, they had been happy. They had been invincible, as if they could take on the world with each other by their side.

"I was scared," he admitted. "Look, Joyce, I was just a seventeen year old kid. Everyone's talking about applying for college and doing things they dreamt about for years, and I did too. I couldn't imagine staying here in Hawkins for the rest of my life. I couldn't see a future here. You know that."

"Yeah, I do. It was the reason I left you, you know."

He didn't know. He just assumed that he did something or said something wrong somewhere, and that with graduation looming it was just natural that they each went their separate ways.

"You were restless as graduation approached and you just wouldn't stop talking about leaving. You didn't mention me at all in any of your plans, Hop. When you talked about applying to college in New York or Chicago, and moving there for good to get away from here... I was never part of your plan. You didn't stop to ask if I'd want to apply to a college near you so we could be together. I wasn't sure if you even wanted me there wherever you planned to be. I thought – I thought you wanted to leave anything and everything related to Hawkins behind, me included. I loved you but I couldn't see myself with someone who didn't want me to be part of his life and so I left. I was heartbroken and Lonnie was there to pick up the pieces."

He remembered the shouting match they had after he came back from visiting one of the colleges with his father... He didn't understand why she couldn't be excited for him back then.

"God, we were so stupid," he chuckled bitterly. "We were shit at talking."

"Yes," she laughed loudly. "We just assumed. Made an ass out of each other."

"Seeing you with Lonnie at prom... It sealed the deal. Then there was a call for enlistment and it was the perfect opportunity to leave, even if it was to Nam to serve. You know the rest... I should have told you a long time ago, Joyce. I was fucking stupid."

"Told me what, Hop? What were you scared about?"

He let out a shaky breath. But, like she pointed out earlier, it had been years. There was nothing to lose.

"I had these feelings for you and it scared me – I've never felt that way for anyone. I didn't know how to deal with it."

"Not even with Chrissy Carpenter?" she teased.

"She was hot but you were... You're Joyce, you know what I mean? You were badass and great, and I just liked you a lot. Sounds stupid and juvenile now that I'm saying it out loud," he snickered.

He opened the second can of beer.

"Do you think it would have been different for us?"

Hopper considered the question for a moment.

"Yeah," he nodded. "You wouldn't have Jonathan, then you wouldn't have decided to marry Lonnie. You wouldn't have Will after. Things happen for a reason, Joyce, but whatever it is, it's brought us here again. You and me."

She sniffed, crushing the cigarette under her boots. "You're right. My boys... They're the best things to ever happen to me."

He nodded, giving her a smile. Sara was the best thing to happen to him, too.

"So," he leaned back in his seat, watching her. "You and Bob, huh? Saw you two together at the diner."

She blushed. "He's sweet."

"Glad it's working out," he squeezed her knees and stood up. He picked up his jacket. "Aren't you glad you took my advise?"

In Temporary Fix (in earlier chapter), after their argument, Hopper told Joyce to call Bob. So this is a call back to that one shot.

20. All The Reasons No

From the tumblr dialogue prompt: "I can't keep kissing strangers and pretending that they're you."

All The Reasons No

Jim Hopper sat the bar nursing a drink, not really paying the patrons there any mind. The television was showing the rerun of a game which he was watching without truly comprehending.

"Buy me a drink?"

He turned to the woman who had just occupied the stool next to him.

He bought her a drink, of course, and somehow during the course of the night, they ended up at a small, dimly lit pathway leading to the establishment, kissing.

For the umpteenth time that month, his thoughts were interspersed with images of Joyce while his tongue was actually down this random woman's throat.

It sobered him up really quickly and he pulled back, blinking down at the red haired woman. Quite frankly, he was disoriented by the red hair. He had somehow pictured dark brown hair.

Not Joyce, he shook his head.

"Sorry, I – " he backed away slowly. "Can't do this."

He sat in his Blazer reeling from the incident and breathing heavily. Truthfully, he was so frustrated. Something was wrong with him and he couldn't figure out what.

How could he be thinking of what it was like to kiss Joyce and to feel her in his arms when she was clearly still mourning over Bob's death? The man had barely been dead for two months and –

Hopper tossed his hat on the passenger seat in annoyance, refusing to go down that road.

It wasn't like he could make a move on her. It was Joyce for God's sake.

They had a history, a romantic one at that, in high school and that was a can of worms he didn't care to open considering the manner in which they broke up. She clearly loved and missed Bob and he could never disrespect her feelings that way. There was also the fact that she considered him a friend and a confidante, someone who knew and understood what she went through.

He didn't want to risk any of that. There were so many reasons why it could never work.

There are plenty of reasons why it would, a traitorous voice whispered.

He remembered a time only a few days back when he couldn't pull his gaze away from the sight of his cigarette dangling between her lips. He had wanted to pluck it out so he could kiss those lips and honestly, the feeling scare him. It was overwhelming and intense, and he didn't know how much self-control he had in him to keep turning a blind eye to it.

He tried to bury it deep inside.

Christmas gave way to New Year and yet, that desire did not go away with time.

It became increasingly difficult to be around her.

"Are you okay, Hop?"

"Huh?" he turned towards her in the midst of opening a can of beer.

"I've heard ... rumours."

He chuckled. "Since when did you pay attention to that?"

"I don't but people talk when they come by the store."

"What have you been hearing?"

"I think you are disappointing some women, Chief," she grinned

teasingly. "What's this about making out with women in the bars and never taking things further with them?"

His ears turned pink. Hopper sniffed from the cold. They really should head back inside instead of sitting out here on the porch but inside was a chaotic mess of loud speaking teenagers.

"They're disappointed, huh?" He asked after a minute.

"Sure are," she nodded.

"I've got El. Can't bring women back when there's a kid."

"At the cabin, sure... What about your mother's place? That's been yours for years."

He grunted. "Sounds like you're strongly encouraging me to sleep around."

Joyce laughed. "No, I just – You do have a reputation and now you're making yourself a new one, it seems. I'm just concern if everything is okay... That's all."

"What do you mean?"

She shrugged. "Well, when men hits a certain age, they do have ... a certain problem with...." She gestured vaguely in the direction of his crotch."

"For fuck's sake," he raised his voice. "It's not *that*."

"Okay," she raised both hands in a placating manner. "I wasn't... Jesus, Hop, no need to be so defensive. So you've got other problems and not an erectile dysfunction – good to know."

"You're really something, Horowitz," he muttered.

"So what is it?"

Again, there she was with that maddening grin. One he was familiar with from their time in school and when she was in this mood, she would never let it go.

"Nothing."

"Aww, no, don't do that. What is it, Hopper?"

She jostled his sides playfully.

"I can't keep kissing strangers and pretending that they're you, okay?" he shot at her, unable to keep it in. Her eyes widened and her mouth opened in shock at that unexpected remark. "I can't cause they're not you and I see that each time I look at them, and I can't do more. You're – " *the only one I want to kiss*, he wanted to say but it died on his lips.

He had said too much. He couldn't take them back now. They were screwed. *He* was screwed.

Joyce was staring at him.

"I should go. El wants to stay the night here. You're okay with that, right?"

Joyce nodded mutely.

"Right. Tell her I've got a call and I gotta run. I'll pick her up tomorrow after breakfast."

He bolted out of there before he could say something embarrassing or worse, something to ruin what they had now. He would need to fix this tomorrow. He wasn't sure how but he would figure something out.

21. Getting There

This is from the 52 weeks with a 52 different themes that I meant to start earlier in the year for my different otps but never got around to. So the first theme for the first week is: *a story about a "New Beginning"*

Getting There

Three years after he signed the adoption papers for Jane 'El' Hopper, he never imagined he would be where he was now – in the house he grew up in as a child down by the cul-de-sac with a teenage girl whose entire life he was now responsible for.

Hopper had of course planned to move the kid out of the cabin once it was deemed safe. He would move them to his parent's old house since it was his anyway. He wanted a life for her and the childhood she never thought she could have. He wanted her to be able to go to school, to worry about homework and projects and to hang out with some friends on weekend.

That happened about six months after she closed the gate. It was safe for her so he moved them both out of the woods. He enrolled her in the school after asking her again and again to make sure it was not all too much for her. They could do it slowly, take one step at a time but those six months of Joyce's homeschooling had made her eager to be in a classroom with other children. Hopper took her with him whenever he had errands to run. He brought her to the diner for breakfast and to where Joyce work just so the people in Hawkins would get used to seeing her with him. He also wanted her to get used to actually being out in public without having the need to hide.

The boys showed all the little nooks and crannies in Hawkins, introduced her the alternative short cut routes, told her where to get the best ice cream from and what kind of people to avoid – mainly Max's brother, a point Lucas constantly liked to stress to her.

On his off days, Hopper taught his kid how to cycle before he eventually bought her a bicycle of her own to get around with Max and the boys. He gave her some money to spend at the arcade and for

herself.

Slowly, it started to shape out to be a normal life – just a single father with his teenage daughter – and for the first time after a long time, Hopper realised he was contented.

It didn't mean he wanted to spend every waking moment with his kid, though. There were times when he craved to be alone, sometimes to remember Sara by but he *never* allowed himself to wallow too long in the sadness and sometimes just to catch his breath because El could be a handful. It meant that there was the usual hang out at the Wheeler's place and sleepover at the Byers.

The fact that Will and El formed a closed relationship and bonded over their trauma in the Upside Down shouldn't have surprised him but it did.

Not that it was something to complain about since the closer they got, the closer *he* got to Joyce.

Even before he moved from the cabin to the better part of town where his parents' house was located, Joyce had often come by his place mostly to check on El who looked up at her as a sort of maternal figure. Hopper let it since there were some things and some questions she had that only Joyce could answer and help her through with.

When Joyce wasn't too busy with her sons and El, she made time for him. When Will and El ran off to one of their rooms to do whatever it was they did, Joyce and him would ended up alone together. It gave them a lot of opportunity and time to be with each other. He should have seen it coming but he was blindsided by how something old and dormant and *hungry* rekindled between them.

The first time they got together had been a clash of teeth and urgent hands roaming the skin under the shirts. The first time they got together, she had sighed in his ear as if having him finally inside of her made her feel at ease. They first time they got together, he had almost lost control and she had laughed delightfully by how much he seemed to desire her.

She wasn't wrong. He desired everything about her. She was fiery and protective yet soft and kind. Joyce looked nothing like the sixteen year old girl he had gotten together with in his youth but this Joyce with her experience and her wisdom and the strength from what she had endured was someone he would fight for everyday of his life.

At night, sometimes when his thoughts kept him awake, he would wonder what it would have been like for them if Will had not gone missing and if they had not gone through the things they went through together in search of him. Their messy past and the bitter separation in their senior year of high school would have ensured that they walk different paths.

He knew that was what would have happen.

When he returned to Hawkins in '75 after Sara's death, it was always just the occasional civil hello and goodbye whenever they crossed paths. That changed until '83 when the Upside Down put them in each other's lives again.

"Hey," Hopper greeted, poking his head into the kitchen to see that Joyce was there.

Nothing beat coming home from work to find her at his place.

"Hey yourself," she smiled back at him.

She was still in her work uniform which meant she must have come here straight after her shift. His eyes travelled towards the stove to find some leftover mac and cheese, something he recalled El had asked for two days ago.

"You made that for her?" he asked, crossing the room to give her a quick peck on the lips.

"I haven't forgotten that she asked for it and I didn't think you'd be whipping up some mac and cheese with your double shifts. Yeah, Hop, I heard about the double shifts."

"Bet it was Flo," he rolled his eyes. "So you're here... You staying the night?"

He tried not to sound too hopeful but Will's bicycle was parked outside his house which meant her son was here, as well, likely up in El's room doing homework, he hoped.

Joyce's reaction wasn't the reaction he was hoping for. She winced and looked away, stepping back from him to put the clean dishes away. He liked that she was so familiar with his kitchen and the rest of his house, as if she belonged there.

"Jane is a little angry with me. I don't think she'd want me around."

"That's not her decision to make. It's my house, my rules so I call the shots," he muttered. "What happened, Joyce?"

"Well, I told her she has to clean up after herself – wash her dirty plates and dry them instead of leaving them out in the sink. It was time for her soap on TV so she said she would do it later. I – I told her she had to get to it immediately. She wasn't happy."

He sighed. "She threw a tantrum?"

"Oh, no," Joyce was quick to shake her head. Throwing a tantrum often meant having an object telekinetically flying through the room, something Hopper forbade. "Just your normal teenage defiance – slamming the door."

"I'll talk to her," he assured, running his hand up and down her arm soothingly. "Stay the night, come on. Will's here anyway."

He wanted her to stay the night every night but short of proposing marriage, he had no idea how to actually ask her to move in. There was a room Will already occupied whenever the Byers slept over just as El has a room in the Byers place for when she spent the night there. Hell, Will's room in Hopper's house was equipped with a bunk bed for when Jonathan visit from college.

It would be easier for them to just *stay*. This constant driving back and forth between his place and hers was fine at first but he wanted more. He wanted them all together.

El was Joyce's as much as he considered Will and Jonathan a part of his. The years had pushed them together and they were a unit now.

Everyone in town knew, even Lonnie who made a big deal out of it when he first found out.

This was the beginning he never thought he could ever find after Sara's death and his eventual divorce but here he was. It was ironic how he thought moving back to Hawkins was the final low blow in his life but it was in Hawkins that he managed to turn it around.

All those years he spent alone in a blurry haze of alcohol and cigarette, it never ever crossed his mind that he would have a daughter again but he has that and more. He wasn't expecting to start anything with Joyce again or even thought they could but they did, and by God, this time, he would never let her go.

"Talk to her first," Joyce laughed, pushing him out of the kitchen.

"The girl needs to learn to listen to her mother – it'll save me the trouble," he grumbled.

To her credit, Joyce had stopped tensing whenever she heard that word coming from him.

New beginnings, he mused to himself as he made his way up to El's room to deal with a little teenage angst.

He would deal with this any day if it meant he could keep all these people in his life.

22. Not His Place

For elizabethbaenks who asked for "but also pls consider writing something where Hopper feels he has to punch things because he's frustrated he can't kiss Joyce"

Not His Place

Hopper had been the one to nudge Joyce in Bob's direction, all to stop her from going around trying to feel *something*. Maybe it was a self-serving bias but Bob was better than any random stranger who would have gotten in her bed and then leave, and he was right. From all accounts, Bob was perfect for her. He was sweet and gentle and he was patient with her.

From what he heard, she was happy which made his death another tragic blow to Joyce.

Even though he had been the one to suggest that she call Bob, Hopper was only human and he wouldn't help feeling a little disgruntled whenever he came across them both having lunch by the bench outside of the store where Joyce worked or to see her dropping by Radio Shack. Of course, Hopper didn't think he was deserving of Joyce, not with all the baggage he had and the child he had sequestered in his cabin - there were too many secrets - but it didn't mean he didn't feel a twinge of jealousy.

If they had not been fleeing from murderous hounds, Hopper would have given himself time to feel lousy for being jealous but as it were he didn't have time to think when they had to deal with issues of life and death.

Joyce was shaking in front of him, taken aback by the dead, cold look in Will's eyes when he demanded to be released.

"Will's still in there. He's talking to us," he had told the group just seconds ago.

The teenagers had broken into a low chatter, trying to think of a way get Will to give them his message and Joyce, wide-eyed and nails

bitten to the quick had suggested that they just keep talking to him to buy time.

"Time," Jonathan whispered.

He had scrambled to his room and the others seeing him spring into action had gotten crayons, pens and papers and assigned themselves roles as the decoders.

But Joyce....

Joyce had simply just stood there, lost in her own house.

"He's still in there, Joyce," Hopper said, standing next to her.

She didn't seem to hear him. She was staring out of the window to the place where Will was tied up and she was shaking.

Hopper touched her shoulder gently to get her attention.

"Joyce..."

"I can't lose him, too. I can't lose him to that monster like I lost Bob."

She turned her towards him then, her brown eyes staring up at him with something akin to hope and a quiet plea for him to save the ones she love. It made him ache with the need to wipe the look from her face. He would do everything he could to make sure she never had to suffer another loss.

And it was highly inappropriate given the situation but he wanted to do nothing more than to take her in his arms and kiss her; a to comfort her, to assure her, to let her know that he was here, a kiss that was also a promise that she could trust him to help her all the way through.

He couldn't. It wasn't his place.

Hopper clenched his fist tightly. Had he been alone, he would have hit something... anything to get rid of this overwhelming need.

Logically, he knew that being here with her and helping Will was all

she needed from him. But ... His gaze dropped to her lips.

His fist slammed against the side of the cabinet.

Joyce jumped. The teenagers looked at him.

Hopper blinked, unaware of what he had done. But as he took in the alarmed looks he was receiving, he slowly realised the ache forming in his right hand.

"We need to get that thing out of Will's head... or body, whatever," he muttered. "The sooner the better... What's taking them so long?"

"Got it," Jonathan burst into the room, holding up a cassette and a radio.

"Let's go," Mike dashed in front of them.

Hopper promptly turned away and at the door, he glanced behind to look at Joyce. She hurried after the boys, completely oblivious to Hopper's internal struggle just moments ago.

"Listen closely," he told the group of them before pulling the door close to get back to Will.

23. Chaperone

Chaperone

The clock was ticking but they still had plenty of time to spare.

In the living room where Hopper was waiting, he agreed to another game with Will on the Atari. The boy had been ready since twenty minutes and now, with Jonathan in New York, Hopper had stepped up to teach him the way to fix a tie to go with the dark blue suit.

"You're cheatin'," Hopper grumbled, pressing hard on the buttons in an attempt to somehow, by some miracle, get a point ahead.

Instead of feeling insulted, Will laughed. "I am just better than you."

Hopper scoffed but he was pleased at the same time. Will had always been a little quiet and shy but lately, he was opening up and it was statement like those that actually made Hopper believe that all the time he spent around the Byers was actually worth it. Well, aside from getting to spend time with Joyce, of course.

"We're ready," a soft voice said from behind him.

Good, he thought. He didn't think he could take losing thrice in a row.

"Alright," he smacked his knees and pushed himself up. "Let's –"

He turned and gaped before remembering his present company. Hopper shut his mouth and cleared his throat.

"Come on, let's go," El hurried them. "I don't want to keep Mike waiting."

Will did not need to be told twice. He had already turned off the game and was heading for the door. El grabbed her coat, slipping it over her red dress that Hopper had specially picked out for this school dance. Shaking her head with amusement at El's enthusiasm, Joyce followed after them.

At the door, she stopped to look at him. "Are you coming?"

"Wha – Yeah," he nodded, picking his hat off the coffee table.

The drive to school in Hopper's Blazer was filled with Will quizzing El on the songs playing on the radio. To say she had improved would be an understatement. She could not name most of the songs together with the singer.

While the children were occupied, Hopper kept stealing covert glances at the woman sitting next to him. In her black dress that flattered her curves and hair tied into a chignon, she was a sight to behold. She had even dusted on some blusher on her cheeks and applied a red lipstick to go with. It was rare to see her doll herself up but she deserve some nights like tonight.

Joyce called him out on it the moment they rolled into the school parking space and the two kids ran off to meet the rest of their friends.

"What is it?" she pressed when he waved off her earlier question. "Is it too much? I should have just wear the clothes I normally would, shouldn't I? I mean... I am just here as a parent volunteer and they never said I had to dress up while I'm chaperoning..."

She bit her bottom lip and Hopper had to take in a deep breath just to stop himself from kissing her so she would quit worrying her lip.

"No," he frowned. "There's a theme which you should follow, and you did. And – uh -," he rubbed the back of his neck, "El chose the dress for you... It looks good."

"She did," Joyce nodded. "I think your daughter has excellent taste."

"Yeah," Hopper agreed. "I think it makes you look beautiful."

"Oh..."

His gaze flew to hers. She sounded disappointed... Had he said something wrong?

"Only now, in this dress? What about other times, Hop?"

She tried to keep a serious face but the grin was threatening to break out.

Hop chuckled. He should have seen that coming. Growing up, Joyce took great pleasure in teasing him and it was nice to see this side of her again once in a while.

"**I think you're beautiful,**" he admitted. "In this dress or in your pajamas..."

He winked and she laughed.

24. Another Chance

The ending of season 3 destroyed me as I'm sure it destroyed you. I wrote this while in the middle of the season and had no idea the ending was gonna be that, thus instead of discarding this fic, here you go.

Another Chance

The last thing Hopper expected when he sought Murray's help was to be called out by the guy.

Who gave the man the right to dissect what was going on between him and Joyce? He should mind his own business and focus on the Russians.

But, maybe....

Maybe, the man had a point.

Hopper stared straight ahead, feeling the back of his neck and ears prickled from anger and embarrassment. He wanted to spare a glance at Joyce to see how she was taking this but he didn't dare to.

Murray could be right and *that* did not sit well with him.

What was going on between Joyce and him anyway?

Was he really behaving the way he is because he had problems dealing with his feelings? He realized that he had acted irrationally on a few occasions – telling Joyce it wasn't a date so she would not be afraid to have dinner with him and then growing increasingly angry and jealous when he found out she had spent that time with his son's science teacher – but she was all he could think about now that El spent most of her time with Mike.

To be fair, her worry about fucking magnets actually led to them here. Spending more time together, ironically.

He didn't like that Joyce had called him out earlier as well, in the woods with Smirnoff. He didn't like the fact that *he* became

unreasonable about her talking to other men. He wasn't a possessive man. He wasn't that way. He really wasn't but this was Joyce and God, he had wanted her to see him since they were in 7th grade but there was always someone or something else winning her attention.

First, it was Lonnie Byers.

So he moved on, went to 'Nam, settled down when the war was done and had his family.

When he lost Sarah and returned, it was Joyce's son. But he didn't mind it much, it was what brought them closer again.

Then she found Bob Newby.

Now though...

Everything was safe (or at least, it felt relatively safe in Hawkins the past year) and she still wouldn't look at him the way he wanted to be seen. He understood she was grieving and the first half a year, he made sure he was there for her. He knew what it was like to grieve for someone you loved and lost, but he also knew the hard way that one shouldn't dwell on it too long without risking losing yourself to the grieve and pain entirely.

She should move on.

She should move on with him in her life, and he had been trying to help her with the whole moving on. He had been patient, which wasn't his strongest suit to begin with, but it was all becoming too much because now...

They are under threat *again*.

They could never catch a break in this town.

Which reminded him of another fact – Joyce looking to move away. He had made a noise and felt Joyce glaring at him.

In the distance, he could see the bright, colourful lights from the carnival. Joyce shifted her attention from him, straining neck to try and catch a glimpse of their children.

He actually liked it when she referred to the children as theirs. *Our kids*. It was nice to have something to share with Joyce.

It gave him ... hope.

He glanced at her.

He would try again, he decided. He would ask her out, give this another chance. They could work. He knew they could.

They made a good team, and they would definitely make a good team co-parenting those kids.

25. Vice

Vice

This is the tragic story of Joyce Horowitz and James Hopper.

They could not have been more different. They grew up in different part of Hawkins that set apart their socioeconomic background, which influenced their social life.

Joyce lived with her father on the outskirts of town, devoid of nearby neighbours. They were almost isolated from everyone else, just the way her father liked it, and that was the same for her in school too.

Jim, as he liked to be called, lived in the middle of town, surrounded by neighbours in white picket fence with a mother who adored him and a father who when not too busy working was present enough to be there for his son.

(So far, only Joyce had dared to call him 'Hop' but that would be a story for later).

In high school, Jim was popular. Not that he played football or was an athlete but he carefree and hung around with the right crowd, and it helped that he had a dark, penetrating gaze that made other girls squirm in delight when he turned his eyes on them. He could be charming when he wanted to. He was sarcastic but never made fun of anyone. Not that he went out of his way to stop bullies either.

Jim also had a vice – smoking. That was probably the only thing that Joyce and Jim had in common.

Sometimes, he would join her to smoke under the bleachers. In silence – they didn't exchange any words or have a conversation, at least not in the beginning.

It first started when Jim asked for a lighter after patting his pockets and coming up empty. She tossed it in his direction.

"Thanks," he muttered.

Not quite a conversation but it was something.

Joyce ran out of money to get a pack one day but still, she headed to the bleachers during a free period regardless. Second hand smoking was better than not smoking, she figured.

Jim gave her a stick from his pack.

"Hey," he started. "If you need some cash, you can do my biology homework. I'll pay."

She snorted. "What makes you think that I even do my own homework, Hopper?"

"Don't know, maybe 'cause you're smart. You don't get good grades skipping homework or not studying, Horowitz. You got a what? Some B+ for the last quiz or something?"

"Oh, you been observing?"

She didn't get an answer.

She did get five dollars from him when she passed the said homework under the bleachers on the following Monday.

"You're not stupid, you know," Joyce made a passing comment one day as they stood next to each other, taking a drag of their cigarette. "You're just lazy. How'd you explain passing the quiz without even studying?"

He shrugged.

"Guess I paid attention in class and retain some information up here," he tapped his temple with a smirk. "You going for the dance?"

"Not my thing," she answered.

Jim took a drag from his cigarette. "Okay."

He went with a cheerleader. And had her at the back seat of his car that night which somehow became public knowledge the following school week, much to his displeasure. He was never one to kiss and

tell but the girls... They tend to share everything.

That night after the dance, after he had dropped his date home, he drove past the diner to see Joyce there, sitting at the booth by the window and sipping on a vanilla milkshake by herself. He never would have pegged her for a vanilla kind of person. He thought she would have gone for the cookies & cream or the chocolate like he would have. Interesting, he thought.

"Could have gone for the dance," he said, plopping down uninvited across from her at the booth.

"Not my thing," she repeated. "What are you doing here?"

There were strands of hair framing her face, getting into her eyes. She could never keep her hair neat like the other girls and he wondered about it. Couldn't she just take a comb to it?

But, he sort of liked it. The mess - it was very Joyce.

"Waffles," he answered.

He ate in silence but he was aware of her watching him. He never felt the need to fill the space between them with words. He didn't feel that the silence between them was ever awkward.

Could it have stemmed from the days they spent smoking quietly next to each other under the bleachers?

When she was done, she stood up and left with a simple, "good night, Hop."

That was the first time he was ever called that and he found himself taking the nickname in his stride.

In their last term in senior year, he saw her with Lonnie Byers. Something in Jim snapped; something made him angry; something that he couldn't explain.

Joyce wasn't often at the bleachers anymore.

He never understood what she saw in that douchebag who wore

leather jacket as if it suited him. Was it his motorcycle?

One day, during fifth period, Jim saw her sneaking through the back of the school from where he was standing at the third floor window. He knew where she was heading. He followed.

"Thought you would have lost your way trying to find this forgotten place," he said snarkily.

She raised her head to look at him, hand poised mid-air before it resumed its trajectory and the cigarette stick found its way to her lips.

"Missed me?" she smirked.

She was infuriating. He scowled.

She married Lonnie Byers.

Jim heard that she was pregnant days before she was bound to leave for college. She cancelled college and married that douche. He hated Byers and he became angry at her.

She would have done so well in college. She could have had the world.

Then Vietnam happened. His grades were already not good enough for a decent college so he signed up. He let himself be drafted into the army. He left Hawkins.

He got married when he came back. Joined the police academy. Led a good life, he had Sara and everything felt into place.

Until he lost her.

When he returned to Hawkins, he tried looking for Joyce. She was the only connection to the old life that he knew. Some semblance of things that were good before it imploded in his face. He found her one late afternoon, hurrying to the supermarket, haggard and tired, looking ten years older than her age.

She wasn't the Joyce he knew.

But he wasn't the Jim that used to smoke with her under the bleachers either.

Because now he had a new vice – alcohol - and it wasn't one that Joyce shared with him.

I know it says tragic story and i meant for it go all the way to the end of the latest season, but I got busy and posted this one first. Part 2 might come up later!